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SCIENCE FICTION

AUGUST 1954

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By William Tenn

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Galaxy

SCIENCE FICTION

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Cover by VIDMER Showing HUNTING ON ALDEBARAN IV

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What Strange Powers Did The Ancients Possess?

EVERY important discovery relating to mind power, sound thinking and cause and effect, as applied to self-advancement, was known centuries ago, before the masses could read and write.

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Wisdom is not readily attainable by the general public; not recognized when right within reach. The average person absorbs a multitude of details about things, but goes through life without evet knowing where and how to acquire mastery of the fundamentals of the innet mind—that mysterious silent something which "whispers" to you from within.

Fundamental Laws of Nature

Your habits, accomplishments and weaknesses are the effects of causes. Your thoughts and actions are governed by fundamental laws. Example: The law of compensation is as fundamental as the laws of breathing, eating and sleeping. All fixed laws of nature are as fascinating to study as they are vital to understand for success in life.

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Not for General Distribution

Sincere men and women, in search of the truth—those who wish to fit in with the ways of the world—are invited to write for complimentary copy of the sealed booklet, "The Mastery of Life." It tells how to contact the librarian of the archives of AMORC for this rare knowledge. This booklet is not intended for general distribution; nor is it sent without request. It is therefore suggested that you write for your copy to Scribe H.K.M.

The ROSICRUCIANS
[AMORC]
San Jose California

SUPERWHAT?

IF you've read enough science fiction, a plot instantly comes to mind at the mention of *Homo superior*:

There is a tiny race of mutants among us. They are in danger because we lesser creatures, envious or fearful of their vast intelligence, will gang up and kill them off.

So the mutants sneak away and hole up in the more inaccessible parts of this world or some other, waiting to gain the numerical and technological power to defend themselves from us—even (or sometimes especially) over our dead bodies.

For one reason or another, they almost always lose out. This, as much as I enjoyed some of the better superman stories, always struck me as very peccable logic.

Why should we, members of a brutish race, feel a sense of tragedy when they are destroyed? The fact that we do, even when it's only fictional extermination, seems to me to make the notion of a monolithic racial hostility preposterous.

If *Homo superior* can be knocked off so readily, it's not a fraction as smart as perfectly ordinary people who slip under the Iron Curtain, or criminals who manage to break out of prison and escape police cordons.

Considering the dialogue of these superhumans, as reported by various authors, this view is not at all unlikely. A more ear-bending pack of generality-spouters would be intolerable to imagine. They all sound like political commentators, which raises a horrifying thought—do people like this actually belong to the indomitably dull coming race? If so, I retroactively cancel my sympathy for the victims of what I can only call justifiable self-defense.

My own opinion—which won't influence the stories I buy, of course—is that *Homo superior* makes sense only to those with literary tunnel vision.

Look:

Evolution always tends toward specialization. Human civilization is an actual, functioning ecology, with the difference that it is an interdependence *within* a species instead of among many. The evolution of mankind in this civilization-ecology is in the direction of specialization—and the type known as *Homo superor* is only another specialization.

I know that's a red-flag statement because it has already gotten me into a number of argu-

ments, but let me give you the steps of my reasoning before you write a "Dear sir, you cur" letter to me.

A natural ecology *must* contain many specializations.

In a successful ecology, no one specialization is more important than the others.

The buman equivalent of natural specializations is aptitude.

The concept of *Homo superior* is based on the groundless belief that intelligence is the criterion.

In a successful civilization-ecology, high intelligence is just one specialization or aptitude among many.

If I were an extremist, I would say that the real races of mankind are the aptitude groups. There may be justification for such a statement, but I'll leave that for the experts to decide. All I can legitimately note is that there is a sharp distinction among the creative types, the abstract reasoners, the mechanically inclined, the physical doers, those who are at home with repetitive jobs on assembly lines and such, teaching, religious or other dedication, selling, outdoor workers, and so forth.

Homo superior may be jack of all trades, like da Vinci—but you can't build a complete ecology on jacks of all trades. It wouldn't function if every man could design, build, sell, entertain, instruct and tote and haul, and did so.

It wouldn't be a civilization; it would be chaos.

So my view is that *Homo superior,* as described in science fiction, is among us—but only as another specialization. His contribution is significant. It is ecologically no more significant, however, than the others.

As for the notion that he is a mutant and therefore must hide out from us, I think the reasoning is visibly distorted.

If any mutant had to do so, it would be some species other than our own.

Rats, for instance. They are immensely intelligent, have a genuine society, including the division of labor according to aptitude . . . and can gain access to our labs and archives. Also, if they mutated, we would intensify our fight against them perhaps to the point of dropping international antagonisms. Certainly they would be an even greater threat than fission warfare, for mutated rats could rob us into starvation, spread disease purposefully and combat us right in our own homes.

I wouldn't be surprised if they could build spaceships and flee to other planets.

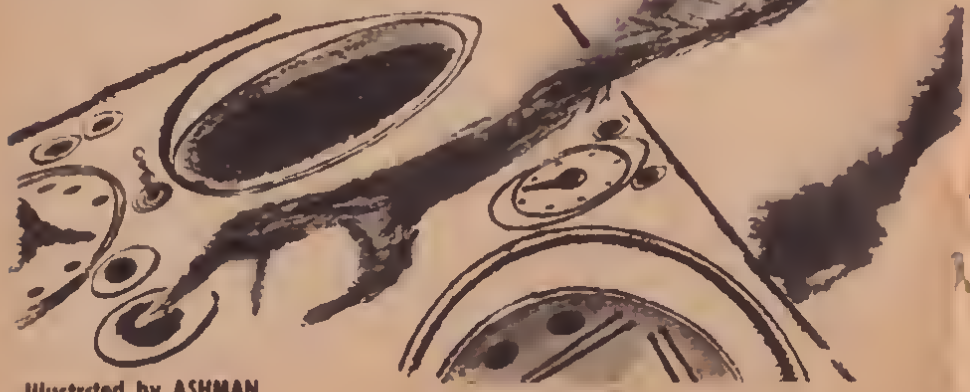
Maybe they have!

—H. L. GOLD

party of the two parts

By WILLIAM TENN

Friend, are you hemmed in by the immutable laws of the Universe? Then hire yourself a Gtetan lawyer to crack open the loopholes!



Illustrated by ASHMAN

GALACTOGRAM FROM STELLAR SERGEANT O-DIK-VEH, COMMANDER OF OUTLYING PATROL OFFICE 1001625, TO HEADQUARTERS DESK SERGEANT HOY-VEH-CHALT, GALACTIC PATROL HEADQUARTERS ON VEGA XXI—(PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS TO BE TRANSMITTED AS A PERSONAL, NOT OFFICIAL, MESSAGE AND AS SUCH WILL BE CHARGED USUAL HYPERSPACE RATES)

MY dear Hoy:

I am deeply sorry to trouble you again, but, Hoy, am I in a jam! Once more, it's not something that I did wrong, but something I didn't do right—what the Old One is sure to wheeze is "a patent dereliction of obvious duty." And since I'm positive he'll be just as confused as I, once the prisoners I'm sending on by slow light-transport

arrive (when he reads the official report that I drew up and am transmitting with them, I can see him dropping an even dozen of his jaws), I can only hope that this advance message will give you enough time to consult the best legal minds in Vegan Headquarters and get some sort of solution worked out.

If there's any kind of solution available by the time he reads my report, the Old One won't be nearly as angry at my dumping the problem on his lap. But I have an uneasy, persistent fear that Headquarters is going to get as snarled up in this one as my own office. If it does, the Old One is likely to remember what happened in Outlying Patrol Office 1001625 the last time—and then, Hoy, you will be short one spore-cousin.

It's a dirty business all around, a real dirty business. I use the phrase advisedly. In the sense of *obscene*, if you follow me.

AS you've no doubt suspected by now, most of the trouble has to do with that damp and irritating third planet of Sol, the one that many of its inhabitants call Earth. Those damned chittering bipeds cause me more sleeplessness than any other species in my sector. Sufficiently advanced technologically to be almost at Stage 15 — self-developed interplanetary travel—they are still centuries away from the usually concurrent Stage 15A — friendly contact by the galactic civilization.

They are, therefore, still in Secretly Supervised Status, which means that I have to maintain a staff of about two hundred agents on their planet, all encased in clumsy and uncomfortable protoplasmic disguises, to prevent them from blowing their silly selves up before the arrival of their spiritual millennium.

On top of everything, their solar system only has nine planets, which means that my permanent headquarters office can't get any farther away from Sol than the planet they call Pluto, a world whose winters are bearable, but whose summers are unspeakably hot. I tell you, Hoy, the life of a stellar sergeant isn't all *gloor* and *skubbets*, no matter what Rear Echelon says.

In all honesty, though, I should admit that the difficulty did not originate on Sol III this time. Ever since their unexpeeted and uncalled-for development of nuclear fission, which, as you know, cost me a promotion, I've doubled the number of undercover operatives on the planet and given them stern warning to report the slightest technological spurt immediately. I doubt that these humans could invent so

much as an elementary time-machine now, without my knowing of it well in advance.

No, this time it all started on Rugh VI, the world known to those who live on it as Gtet. If you consult your atlas, Hoy, you'll find Rugh is a fair-sized yellow dwarf star on the outskirts of the Galaxy, and Gtet an extremely insignificant planet which has only recently achieved the status of Stage 19—primary interstellar citizenship.

The Gtetans are a modified ameboid race who manufacture a fair brand of *ashkebac*, which they export to their neighbors on Rugh IX and XII. They are a highly individualistic people and still experience many frictions living in a centralized society. Despite several centuries of advanced civilization, most Gtetans look upon the Law as a delightful problem in circumvention rather than as a way of life.

An ideal combination with my bipeds of Earth, eh?

IT seems that a certain L'payr was one of the worst trouble-makers on Gtet. He had committed almost every crime and broken almost every law. On a planet where fully one-fourth of the population is regularly undergoing penal rehabilitation, L'payr was still considered something quite special. A current Gtetan saying, I understand, puts it, "You're like L'payr, fellow—you don't know *when* to stop!"

Nonetheless, L'payr had reached the point where it was highly important that he did stop. He had been arrested and convicted for a total of 2,342 felonies, just one short of the 2,343 felonies which, on Gtet, make one a habitual criminal and, therefore, subject to life imprisonment. He made a valiant effort to retire from public life and devote himself to contemplation and good works, but it was too late. Almost against his will, as he insisted to me under examination in my office, he found his mind turning to foul deeds left undone, illegalities as yet unperpetrated.

And so one day, quite casually —hardly noticing, as it were—he committed another major crime. But this one was so ineffably ugly, involving an offense against the moral code as well as civil legislation, that the entire community turned against L'payr.

He was caught selling pornography to juvenile Gtetans.

The indulgence that a celebrity may enjoy turned to wrath and utter contempt. Even the Gtetan Protective Association of Two Thousand Time Losers refused to raise funds for his bail. As his trial approached, it became obvious to L'payr that he was in for it. His only hope lay in flight.

He pulled the most spectacular coup of his career—he broke out of the hermetically sealed vault in which he was being guarded around the clock (how he did this, he consistently refused to tell me up to the time of his lamented demise or whatever you want to call it) and escaped to the spaceport near the prison. There, he managed to steal aboard the pride of the Gtetan merchant fleet, a newly developed interstellar ship equipped with two-throttle hyperspace drive.

This ship was empty, waiting for a crew to take it out on its maiden run.

Somehow, in the few hours at his disposal before his escape was known, L'payr figured out the controls of the craft and managed to lift it off Gtet and into hyperspace. He had no idea at this time that, since the ship was an experimental model, it was equipped with a transmitting device that kept the spaceport informed of its location.

Thus, though they lacked the facilities to pursue him, the Gtetan police always knew exactly where he was. A few hundred ameboid vigilantes did start after him in old-fashioned, normal-drive ships, but after a month or so of long and fatiguing interstellar travel at one-hundredth his speed, they gave up and returned home.

FOR his hideout, L'payr wanted a primitive and unimportant corner of the Galaxy. The region around Sol was ideal. He materialized out of hyperspace about halfway between the third and fourth planets. But he did it very clumsily (after all, Hoy, the best minds of his race are just beginning to understand the two-throttle drive) and lost all of his fuel in the process. He barely managed to reach Earth and come down.

The landing was effected at night and with all drives closed, so that no one on the planet saw it. Because living conditions on Earth are so different from Gtet, L'payr knew that his mobility would be very limited. His one hope was to get help from the inhabitants. He had to pick a spot where possible contacts would be at maximum and yet accidental discovery of his ship would be at minimum. He chose an empty lot in the suburbs of Chicago and quickly dug his ship in.

Meanwhile, the Gtetan police communicated with me as the local commanding officer of the Galactic Patrol. They told me where L'payr was hidden and demanded extradition. I pointed out that, as yet, I lacked jurisdiction, since no crime of an *interstellar* nature had been committed. The stealing of the ship had been done on his home planet—it had not

occurred in deep space. If, however, he hroke any galactic law while he was on Earth, committed any hreach of the peace, no matter how slight . . .

"How about that?" the Gtetan police asked me over the interstellar radio. "Earth is on Secretly Supervised Status, as we understand it. It is illegal to expose it to superior civilizations. Isn't L'payr landing there in a two-throttle hyperspace-drive ship enough of a misdemeanor to entitle you to pick him up?"

"Not by itself," I replied. "The ship would have to be seen and understood for what it was by a resident of the planet. From what we here can tell, no such ohservation was made. And so long as he stays in hiding, doesn't tell any human about us and refrains from adding to the technological momentum of Earth, L'payr's galactic citizenship has to he respected. I have no legal hasis for an arrest."

Well, the Gtetans grumhled about what were they paying the star tax for, anyway, but they saw my point. They warned me, though, about L'payr—sooner or later his criminal impulses would assert themselves. He was in an impossihle position, they insisted. In order to get the fuel necessary to leave Earth before his supplies ran out, he'd have to commit some felony or other—and as soon as he did so and was arrested, they wanted their extradition request honored.

"The filthy, evil-minded old pervert," I heard the police chief mutter as he clicked off.

I don't have to tell you how I felt, Hoy. A hrilliant, imaginative ameboid criminal at large on a planet as volatile culturally as Earth! I notified all our agents in North America to be on the alert and settled hack to wait it out with prayerfully knotted tentacles.

L'PAYR had listened to most of this conversation over his own ship's receiver. Naturally, the first thing he did was to remove the directional device which had enahled the Gtetan police to locate him. Then, as soon as it was dark again, he managed, with what must have heen enormous difficulty, to transport himself and his little ship to another area of the city. He did this, too, without being ohserved.

He made his base in a slum tenement neighhorhood that had heen condemned to make way for a new housing project and therefore was practically untenanted. Then he settled back to consider his prohlem.

Because, Hoy, he had a prohlem.

He didn't want to get in any trouhle with the Patrol, hut if

he didn't get his pseudopods on a substantial amount of fuel very soon, he'd be a dead ameboid. Not only did he need the fuel to get off Earth, but the converters —which, on this rather primitive Gtetan vessel, changed waste matter back into usable air and food—would be stopping very soon if they weren't stoked up, too.

His time was limited, his resources almost non-existent. The spacesuits with which the ship was furnished, while cleverly enough constructed and able to satisfy the peculiar requirements of an entity of constantly fluctuating format, had not been designed for so primitive a planet as Earth. They would not operate too effectively for long periods away from the ship.

He knew that my OP office had been apprised of his landing and that we were just waiting for some infraction of even the most obscure minor law. Then we'd pounce—and, after the usual diplomatic formalities, he'd be on his way back to Gtet, for a nine-throttle Patrol ship could catch him easily. It was obvious that he couldn't do as be had originally planned—make a fast raid on some human supply center and collect whatever stuff he needed.

His hope was to make a trade. He'd have to find a human with whom he could deal and offer something that, to this particular human in any case, was worth the quantity of fuel L'payr's ship needed to take him to a less policed corner of the Cosmos. But almost everything on the ship was essential to its functioning. And L'payr had to make his trade without (1) giving away the existence and nature of the galactic civilization, or (2) providing the inhabitants of Earth with any technological stimulus.

L'payr later said that he thought about the problem until his nucleus was a mass of corrugations. He went over the ship, stem to stern, again and again, but everything a human might consider acceptable was either too useful or too revealing. And then, just as he was about to give up, he found it.

The materials be needed were those with which he had committed his last crime!

ACCORDING to Gtetan law, you see, Hoy, all evidence pertaining to a given felony is retained by the accused until the time of his trial. There are very complicated reasons for this, among them the Gtetan juridical concept that every prisoner is *known* to be guilty until he manages, with the aid of lies, loopholes and brilliant legalisms, to convince a hard-boiled and cynical jury of his peers that they

should, in spite of their knowledge to the contrary, declare him innocent. Since the burden of proof rests with the prisoner, the evidence does likewise. And L'payr, examining this evidence, decided that he was in business.

What he needed now was a customer. Not only someone who wanted to buy what he had to sell, but a customer who had available the fuel he needed. And in the neighborhood which was now his base of operations, customers of this sort were rare.

Being Stage 19, the Gtetans are capable of the more primitive forms of telepathy—only at extremely short ranges, of course, and for relatively brief periods of time. So, aware that my secret agents had already begun to look for him and that, when they found him, his freedom of action would be even more circumscribed, L'payr desperately began to comb through the minds of any terrestrials within three blocks of his hideout.

Days went by. He scuttled from mind to mind like an insect looking for a hole in a collector's jar. He was forced to shut the ship's converter down to one-half operation, then to one-third. Since this cut his supply of food correspondingly, he began to hunger. For lack of activity, his contractile vacuole dwindled to the size of a pinpoint. Even his endoplasm lost the turgidity of the healthy ameboid and became dangerously thin and transparent.

And then one night, when he had about determined to take his chances and steal the fuel he needed, his thoughts ricocheted off the brain of a passerby, came back unbelievingly, examined further and were ecstatically convinced. A human who not only could supply his needs, but also, and more important, might be in the market for Gtetan pornography!

In other words, Mr. Osborne Blatch.

THIS elderly teacher of adolescent terrestrials insisted throughout all my interrogations that, to the best of his knowledge, no mental force was used upon him. It seems that he lived in a new apartment house on the other side of the torn-down tenement area and customarily walked in a wide arc around the rubble because of the large number of inferior and belligerent human types which infested the district. On this particular night, a teachers' meeting at his high school having detained him, he was late for supper and decided, as he had once or twice before, to take a short cut. He claims that the decision to take a short cut was his own.

Osborne Blatch says that he

was striding along jauntily, making believe his umbrella was a malacca cane, when he seemed to hear a voice. He says that, even at first hearing, he used the word "seemed" to himself because, while the voice definitely had inflection and tone, it was somehow completely devoid of volume.

The voice said, "Hey, bud! C'mere!"

He turned around curiously and surveyed the rubble to his right. All that was left of the building that had once been there was the lower half of the front entrance. Since everything else around it was completely flat, he saw no place where a man could be standing.

But as he looked, he heard the voice again. It sounded greasily conspiratorial and slightly impatient. "C'mere, bud. *C'mere!*"

"What — er — what *is* it, sir?" he asked in a cautiously well-bred way, moving closer and peering in the direction of the voice. The bright street light behind him, he said, improved his courage as did the solid quality of the very heavy old-fashioned umbrella he was carrying.

"C'mere. I got somep'n to show ya. C'mon!"

Stepping carefully over loose brick and ancient garbage, Mr. Blatch came to a small hollow at one side of the ruined entrance. And filling it was L'payr or, as

he seemed at first glance to the human, a small, splashy puddle of purple liquid.

I ought to point out now, Hoy—and the affidavits I'm sending along will substantiate it—that at no time did Mr. Blatch recognize the viscous garment for a spacesuit, nor did he ever see the Gtetan ship which L'payr had hidden in the rubble behind him in its completely tenuous hyperspatial state.

Though the man, having a good imagination and a resilient mind, immediately realized that the creature before him must be extraterrestrial, he lacked overt technological evidence to this effect, as well as to the nature and existence of our specific galactic civilization. Thus, here at least, there was no punishable violation of Interstellar Statute 2,607,193, Amendments 126 through 509.

"What do you have to show me?" Mr. Blatch asked courteously, staring down at the purple puddle. "And where, may I ask, are you from? Mars? Venus?"

"Listen, bud, y'know what's good for ya, y'don't ast such questions. Look, I got somep'n for ya. Hot stuff. *Real* hot!"

MR. BLATCH'S mind, no longer fearful of having its owner assaulted and robbed by the neighborhood tough it had originally visualized, spun off to

a relevant memory, years old, of a trip abroad. There had been that alley in Paris and the ratty little Frenchman in a torn sweater . . .

"What would that be?" he asked.

A pause now, while L'payr absorbed new impressions.

"Ah-h-h," said the voice from the puddle. "I 'ave somezing to show M'sieu zat M'sieu weel like vairry much. If M'sieu weel come a leetle closair?"

M'sieu, we are to understand, came a leetle closair. Then the puddle beaved up in the middle, reaching out a pseudopod that held flat, square objects, and telepathed hoarsely, "'Ere, M'sieu. Feelthy peekshures."

Although taken more than a little aback, Blatch merely raised both eyebrows interrogatively and said, "Ah? Well, well!"

He shifted the umbrella to his left hand and, taking the pictures as they were given to him, one at a time, examined each a few steps away from L'payr, where the light of the street lamp was stronger.

When all the evidence arrives, you will be able to see for yourself, Hoy, what they were like. Cheap prints, calculated to excite the grossest ameboid passions. The Gtetans, as you may have heard, reproduce by simple asexual fission, but only in the presence of saline solution—sodium chloride is comparatively rare on their world.

The first photograpb showed a naked ameba, fat and replete with food vacuoles, splashing lazily and formlessly at the bottom of a metal tank in the completely relaxed state that precedes reproducing.

The second was like the first, except that a trickle of salt water had begun down one side of the tank and a few pseudopods had lifted toward it inquiringly. To leave nothing to the imagination, a sketch of the sodium chloride molecule had been superimposed on the upper right corner of the photograph.

In the third picture, the Gtetan was ecstatically awash in the saline solution, its body distended to maximum, dozens of pseudopods thrust out, throbbing. Most of the chromatin had become concentrated in cbromosomes about the equator of the nucleus. To an ameba, this was easily tbe most exciting photograpb in the collection.

The fourth showed the nucleus becoming indented between the two sets of sibling chromosomes —while, in the fifth, with the division completed and the two nuclei at opposite ends of the reproducing individual, the entire cytoplasmic body had begun to undergo constriction about its

middle. In the sixth, the two resultant Gtetans were emerging with passion-satisfied languor from the tank of salt water.

AS a measure of L'payr's depravity, let me pass on to you what the Gtetan police told me. Not only was be peddling the stuff to ameboid minors, but they believed that he had taken the pbotographs himself and that the model had been his own brother—or should I say sister? His own one and only sibling, possibly? This case has many, many confusing aspects.

Blatch returned the last picture to L'payr and said, "Yes, I am interested in buying the group. How much?"

The Gtetan named bis price in terms of the requisite compounds available in the chemistry laboratory of the bigh school where Blatch taught. He explained exactly how be wanted them to be prepared and warned Blatch to tell nobody of L'payr's existence.

"Uzzerwise, when M'sieu gets 'ere tomorrow night, ze peekshures weel be gone, I weel be gone—and M'sieu weel have nozzing to show for his trouble. *Comprenez?*"

Osborne Blatcb seems to have had very little trouble in obtaining and preparing the stuff for which L'payr bad bargained. He said that, by the standards of his community, it was a minute quantity and extremely inexpensive. Also, as he had scrupulously always done in the past when using school supplies for his own experiments, he reimbursed the laboratory out of his own pocket. But he does admit that the photographs were only a small part of wbat he hoped to get out of the ameboid. He expected, once a sound business arrangement bad been establisbed, to find out from wbich part of the Solar System the visitor bad come, wbat his world was like and similar matters of understandable interest to a creature whose civilization is in the late phases of Secretly Supervised Status.

Once the excbange had been effected, however, L'payr tricked him. The Gtetan told Blatch to return on the *next* night when, his time being more free, they could discuss the state of tbe Universe at leisure. And, of course, as soon as the Earthman bad left with the photograpbs, L'payr jammed the fuel into his converters, made the necessary sub-nuclear rearrangements in its atomic structure and, with the hyperspace-drive once more operating under full power, took off like a *rilg* out of *Gowkuldady*.

As far as we can determine, Blatch received the deception philosophically. After all, he still had tbe pictures.

WHEN my OP office was informed that L'payr had left Earth in the direction of the Hercules Cluster M13, without leaving any discernible ripple in terrestrial law or technology behind him, we all relaxed gratefully. The case was removed from TOP PRIORORITY—FULL ATTENTION BY ALL PERSONNEL rating and placed in the PENDING LATENT EFFECTS category.

As is usual, I dropped the matter myself and gave full charge of the follow-up to my regent and representative on Eartb, Stellar Corporal Pah-Chi-Lub. A tracer beam was put on L'payr's rapidly receding ship and I was free to devote my attention once more to my basic problem—delaying the development of interplanetary travel until the various human societies had matured to the requisite higher level.

Thus, six Earth months later, when the case broke wide open, Pah-Chi-Luh handled it himself and didn't bother me until the complications became overwhelming. I know this doesn't absolve me — I have ultimate responsibility for everything that transpires in my Outlying Patrol District. But between relatives, Hoy, I am mentioning these facts to show that I was not completely clumsy in the situation and that a little help from you and the rest of the family, when the case reaches the Old One in Galactic Headquarters, would not merely be charity for a one-headed oafish cousin.

As a matter of fact, I and most of my office were involved in a very complex problem. A Moslem mystic, living in Saudi Arabia, had attempted to heal the ancient schism that exists in his religion between tbe Shiite and Sunnite sects, by communing with the departed spirits of Mohammed's son-in-law, Ali, the patron of tbe first group, and Abu Bekr, the Prophet's father-in-law and founder of the Sunnite dynasty. The object of the mediumistic excursion was to effect some sort of arbitration arrangement in Paradise between the two feuding ghosts that would determine who should rightfully have been Mohammed's successor and the first caliph of Mecca.

Nothing is simple on Earth. In the course of this laudable probe of the bereafter, the earnest young mystic accidentally achieved telepathic contact with a Stage 9 civilization of disembodied intellects on Ganymede, the largest satellite of the planet Jupiter. Well, you can imagine! Tremendous uproar on Ganymede and in Saudi Arabia, pilgrims in both place flocking to see the individuals on either end of the telepathic connection, peculiar and magnificent miracles

being wrought daily. A mess!

And my office feverishly working overtime to keep the whole affair simple and religious, trying to prevent it from splashing over into awareness of the more rational beings in each community! It's an axiom of Outlying Patrol Offices that nothing will stimulate space travel among backward peoples faster than definite knowledge of the existence of intelligent celestial neighbors. Frankly, if Pah-Chi-Luh had come to me right then, blathering of Gtetan pornography in human high-school textbooks, I'd probably have hitten his heads off.

HE'D discovered the textbooks in the course of routine duties as an investigator for a United States Congressional Committee — his disguised status for the last decade or so, and one which had proved particularly valuable in the various delaying actions we had been surreptitiously fighting on the continent of North America. Tbere was this newly puhlished hiology book, written for use in the secondary schools, which had received extremely favorable comment from outstanding scholars in the universities. Naturally, the committee ordered a copy of the text and suggested that its investigator look through it.

Corporal Pah-Chi-Luh turned a few pages and found himself staring at the very pornographic pictures he'd heard about at the hriefing session six months before —puhlished, availahle to everyone on Earth, and especially to minors! He told me afterward, brokenly, that in that instant all he saw was a hrazen repetition of L'payr's ugly crime on his home planet.

He blasted out a Galaxy-wide alarm for the Gtetan.

L'payr had begun life anew as an *ashkebac* craftsman on a small, out-of-the-way, mildly civilized world. Living carefully within the law, he had prospered and, at the time of his arrest, bad become sufficiently conventional —and, incidentally, fat—to think of raising a respectahle family. Not much—just two of him. If things continued to go well, be might consider multiple fission in the future.

He was indignant when he was arrested and carried off to the detention cell on Pluto, pending the arrival of an extradition party from Gtet.

"By what right do you disturb a peace-loving artisan in the quiet pursuit of his trade?" he challenged. "I demand immediate unconditional release, a full apology and restitution for loss of income as well as the emharrassment caused my person and ego. Your superiors will hear of this! False

arrest of a galactic citizen can be a very serious matter!"

"No doubt," Stellar Corporal Pah-Chi-Luh retorted, still quite equable, you see. "But the public dissemination of recognized pornography is even more serious. As a crime, we consider it on a level with—"

"*What* pornography?"

MY assistant said he stared at L'payr for a long time through the transparent cell wall, marveling at the creature's effrontery. All the same, he began to feel a certain disquiet. He had never before encountered such complete self-assurance in the face of a perfect structure of criminal evidence.

"You know very well what pornography. Here — examine it for yourself. This is only one copy out of 20,000 distributed all over the United States of North America for the specific use of human adolescents." He dematerialized the biology text and passed it through the wall.

L'payr glanced at the pictures. "Bad reproduction," he commented. "Those humans still have a long way to go in many respects. However, they do display a pleasing technical precocity. But why show this to me? Surely you don't think *I* have anything to do with it?"

Pah-Chi-Luh says the Gtetan seemed intensely puzzled, yet gently patient, as if he were trying to unravel the hysterical gibberings of an idiot child.

"Do you *deny* it?"

"What in the Universe is there to deny? Let me see." He turned to the title page. "This seems to be *A First Book in Biology* by one Osborne Blatch and one Nicodemus P. Smith. You haven't mistaken me for either Blatch or Smith, have you? My name is L'payr, not Osborne L'payr, nor even Nicodemus P. L'payr. Just plain, old, everyday, simple L'payr. No more, no less. I come from Gtet, which is the sixth planet of—"

"I am fully aware of Gtet's astrographic location," Pah-Chi-Luh informed him coldly. "Also, that you were on Earth six of their months ago. And that, at the time, you completed a transaction with this Osborne Blatch, whereby you got the fuel you needed to leave the planet, while Blatch obtained the set of pictures that were later used as illustrations in that textbook. Our undercover organization on Earth functions very efficiently, as you can see. We have labeled the book Exhibit A."

"An ingenious designation," said the Gtetan admiringly. "Exhibit A! With so much to choose from, you picked the one that sounds just right. My compli-

ments." He was, you will understand, Hoy, in his element—he was dealing with a police official on an abstruse legal point. L'payr's entire brilliant criminal past on a law-despising world had prepared him for this moment. Pah-Chi-Luh's mental orientation, however, had for a long time now been chiefly in the direction of espionage and *sub rosa* cultural manipulation. He was totally unprepared for the orgy of judicial quibbles that was about to envelop him. In all fairness to him, let me admit that I might not have done any better under those circumstances and neither, for that matter, might you—nor the Old One himself!

L'PAYR pointed out, "All I did was to sell a set of artistic studies to one Osborne Blatch. What *he* did with it afterward surely does not concern me. If I sell a weapon of approved technological backwardness to an Earthman — a flint fist-axe, say, or a cauldron for pouring boiling oil upon the stormers of walled cities—and he uses the weapon to dispatch one of his fellow primitives, am I culpable? Not the way I read the existing statutes of the Galactic Federation, my friend. Now suppose you reimburse me for my time and trouble and put me on a fast ship bound for my place of business?"

Around and around they went. Dozens of times, Pah-Chi-Luh, going frantically through the Pluto Headquarters law library, would come up with a nasty little wrinkle of an ordinance, only to have L'payr point out that the latest interpretation of the Supreme Council put him wholly in the clear. I can myself vouch for the fact that the Gtetans seem to enjoy total recall of all judicial history.

"But you *do* admit selling pornography yourself to the Earthman Osborne Blatch?" the stellar corporal bellowed at last.

"Pornography, pornography," L'payr mused. "That would be defined as cheaply exciting lewdness, falsely titillating obscenity. Correct?"

"Of course!"

"Well, Corporal, let me ask you a question. You saw those pictures. Did you find them exciting or titillating?"

"Certainly not. But I don't happen to be a Gtetan ameboid."

"Neither," L'payr countered quietly, "is Osborne Blatch."

I do think Corporal Pah-Chi-Luh might have found some sensible way out of the dilemma if the extradition party had not just then arrived from Gtet on the special Patrol ship which had been sent for it. He now found himself confronted with six more magnificently argumenta-

tive ameboids, numbering among them some of the trickiest legal minds on the home planet. The police of Rugh VI had had many intricate dealings with L'payr in the Gtetan courts. Hence, they took no chances and sent their best representatives.

Outnumbered L'payr may have been, but remember, Hoy, he had prepared for just these eventualities ever since leaving Earth. And just to stimulate his devious intellect to maximum performance, there was the fact that *his* was the only life at stake. Once let bis fellow ameboids get their pseudopods on him again, and be was a gone protozoan.

BETWEEN L'payr and the Gtetan extradition party, Corporal Pah-Cbi-Lub began to find out how unbappy a policeman's lot can become. Back and forth he went, from the prisoner to the lawyers, stumbling through quagmires of opinion, falling into chasms of complexity.

The extradition group was determined not to return to their planet empty-pseudopoded. In order to succeed, they had to make the current arrest stick, which would give them the right —as previously injured parties— to assert their prior claim to the punishment of L'payr. For his part, L'payr was equally determined to invalidate the arrest by the Patrol, since then be would not only have placed our outfit in an uncomfortable position, but, no longer extraditable, would be entitled to its protection from his fellow citizens.

A weary, bleary and excessively hoarse Pah-Chi-Luh finally dragged himself to the extradition party on spindly tentacles and informed them that, after mucb careful consideration, he had come to the conclusion that L'payr was innocent of any crime during his stay on Earth.

"Nonsense," be was told by the spokesman. "A crime was committed. Arrant and unquestioned pornography was sold and circulated on that planet. A crime *has* to have been committed."

Pah-Chi-Luh went back to L'payr and asked, miserably, how about it? Didn't it seem, he almost pleaded, that all the necessary ingredients of a crime were present? *Some* kind of crime?

"True," L'payr said thougbtfully. "They have a point. Some kind of crime *may* have been committed — but not by me. Osborne Blatcb, now . . ."

Stellar Corporal Pah-Chi-Luh completely lost his heads.

He sent a message to Earth, ordering Osborne Blatch to be picked up.

Fortunately for all of us, up to and including the Old One, Pab-Chi-Luh did not go so far as to

have Blatch arrested. The Earthman was merely held as a material witness. When I think what the false arrest of a creature from a Secretly Supervised world could lead to, especially in a case of this sort, Hoy, my blood almost turns liquid.

But Pah-Chi-Luh *did* commit the further blunder of incarcerating Osborne Blatch in a cell adjoining L'payr's. Everything, you will observe, was working out to the ameboid's satisfaction — including my young assistant.

BY the time Pah-Chi-Luh got around to Blatch's first interrogation, the Earthman had already been briefed by his neighbor. Not that the briefing was displayed overmuch—as yet.

"Pornography?" he repeated in answer to the first question. "*What* pornography? Mr. Smith and I had been working on an elementary biology text for some time and we were hoping to use new illustrations throughout. We wanted larger, clear pictures of the sort that would be instantly comprehensible to youngsters—and we were particularly interested in getting away from the blurry drawings that have been used and re-used in all textbooks, almost from the time of Leewenhoek. Mr. L'payr's series on the cycle of ameboid reproduction was a godsend. In a sense, they *made* the first section of the book."

"You don't deny, however," Corporal Pah-Chi-Luh inquired remorselessly, "that, at the time of the purchase, you knew those pictures were pornographic? And that, despite this knowledge, you went ahead and used them for the delectation of juveniles of your race?"

"Edification," the elderly human schoolteacher corrected him. "*Edification,* not delectation. I assure you that not a single student who studied the photographs in question — which, by the way, appeared textually as drawings—received any premature erotic stimulation thereby. I will admit that, at the time of purchase, I did receive a distinct impression from the gentleman in the next cell that he and his kind considered the illustrations rather racy—"

"Well, then?"

"But that was his problem, not mine. After all, if I buy an artifact from an extraterrestrial creature — a flint fist-axe, say, or a cauldron for pouring boiling oil upon the stormers of walled cities — and I use them both in completely peaceful and useful pursuits — the former to grub onions out of the ground and the latter to cook the onions in a kind of soup—have I done anything wrong?

"As a matter of fact, the textbook in question received fine reviews and outstanding commendations from educational and scientific authorities all over the nation. Would you like to hear some of them? I believe I may have a review or two in my pockets. Let me see. Yes, just by chance, I seem to have a handful of clippings in this suit. Well, well! I didn't know there were quite so many. This is what the *Southern Prairie States Secondary School Gazette* has to say—'A substantial and noteworthy achievement. It will live long in the annals of elementary science pedagoguery. The authors may well feel . . .'"

It was then that Corporal Pah-Chi-Luh sent out a despairing call for me.

FORTUNATELY, I was free to give the matter my full attention, the Saudi Arabia-Ganymede affair being completely past the danger point. Had I been tied up . . .

After experimenting with all kinds of distractions, including secret agents disguised as dancing girls, we had finally managed to embroil the young mystic in a tremendous theological dispute on the exact nature and moral consequences of the miracles he was wreaking. Outstanding Mohammedan religious leaders of

the region had lined up on one side or the other and turned the air hlue with quotations from the Koran and later Sunnite hooks. The mystic was drawn in and hecame so involved in the argument that he stopped thinking about his original objeetives and irreparably hroke the mental connection with Ganymede.

For a while, this left a continuing problem on that satellite —it looked as if the civilization of disembodied intellects might eventually come to some approximation of the real truth. Luekily for us, the entire husiness had been viewed there also as a religious phenomenon and, once telepathie contact was lost, the intellect who had been communicating with the human, and had aehieved much prestige therehy, was thoroughly diseredited. It was generally believed that he had willfully and deliberately faked the entire thing, for the purpose of creating skepticism among the more spiritual members of his race. An ecclesiastical court ordered the unfortunate telepath to be embodied alive.

It was, therefore, with a warm feeling of a joh well done that I returned to my headquarters on Pluto in response to Pah-Chi-Luh's summons.

Needless to say, this feeling quickly changed to the most overpowering dismay. After getting

the background from the overwrought corporal, I interviewed the Gtetan extradition force. They had been in touch with their home office and were threatening a major galactic scandal if the Patrol's arrest of L'payr were not upheld and L'payr remanded to their custody.

"Are the most sacred and intimate details of our sex life to be shamelessly flaunted from one end of the Universe to the other?" I was asked angrily. "Pornography is pornography — a crime is a crime. The intent was there —the overt act was there. We demand our prisoner."

"How can you have pornography without titillation?" L'payr wanted to know. "If a Chumblostian sells a Gtetan a quantity of *krrgllwss* — which they use as food and we use as building material — does the shipment have to be paid for under the nutritive or structural tariffs? The structural tariffs obtain, as you well know, Sergeant. I demand immediate release!"

BUT the most unpleasant surprise of all awaited me with Blatch. The terrestrial was sitting in his cell, sucking the curved handle of his umbrella.

"Under the code governing the treatment of all races on Secretly Supervised Status," he began as soon as he saw me, "and I refer not only to the Rigellian-Sagittarian Convention, but to the statutes of the third cosmic cycle and the Supreme Council decisions in the cases of Khwomo vs. Khwomo and Farziplok vs. Antares XII, I demand return to my accustomed habitat on Earth, the payment of damages according to the schedule developed by the Nobri Commission in the latest Vivadin controversy. I also demand satisfaction in terms of—"

"You seem to have acquired a good deal of knowledge of interstellar law," I commented slowly.

"Oh, I have, Sergeant—I have. Mr. L'payr was most helpful in acquainting me with my rights. It seems that I am entitled to all sorts of recompenses — or, at least, that I can claim entitlement. You have a very interesting galactic culture, Sergeant. Many, many people on Earth would be fascinated to learn about it. But I am quite prepared to spare you the embarrassment which such publicity would cause you. I am certain that two reasonable individuals like ourselves can come to terms."

When I charged L'payr with violating galactic secrecy, he spread his cytoplasm in an elaborate ameboid shrug.

"I told him nothing on Earth, Sergeant. Whatever information this terrestrial has received—and

I will admit that it would have been damaging and highly illegal —was entirely in the jurisdiction of *your* headquarters office. Besides, having been wrongfully accused of an ugly and unthinkable crime, I surely had the right to prepare my defense by discussing the matter with the only witness to the deed. I might go further and point out that, since Mr. Blatch and myself are in a sense co-defendants, there could be no valid objection to a pooling of our legal knowledge."

Back in my office, I brought Corporal Pah-Chi-Luh up to date.

"It's like a morass," he complained. "The more you struggle to get out, the deeper you fall in it! And this terrestrial! The Plutonian natives who've been guarding him have been driven almost crazy. He asks questions about everything — what's this, what's that, how does it work. Or it's not hot enough for him, the air doesn't smell right, his food is uninteresting. His throat has developed an odd tickle, he wants a gargle, he needs a—"

"Give bim everything he wants, but within reason," I said. "If this creature dies on us, you and I will be lucky to draw no more than a punishment tour in the Black Hole in Cygnus. But as for the rest of it—look here, Corporal, I find myself in agreement with the extradition party from Gtet. A crime *has* to have been committed."

STELLAR Corporal Pah-Chi-Luh stared at me. "You—you mean . . ."

"I mean that if a crime was committed, L'payr has been legally arrested and can therefore be taken back to Gtet. We will then hear no more from him ever and we will also be rid of that bunch of pseudopod-clacking Gtetan shysters. That will leave us with only one problem—Osborne Blatcb. Once L'payr is gone and we have this terrestrial to ourselves, I think we can handle him—one way or anotber. But first and foremost, Corporal Pah-Chi-Luh, a crime—*some* crime—has to have been committed by L'payr during his sojourn on Earth. Set up your bed in the law library."

Shortly afterward, Pah-Chi-Luh left for Earth.

Now please, Hoy, no moralistic comments! You know as well as I do that this sort of thing has been done before, here and there, in Outlying Patrol Offices. I don't like it any more than you, but I was faced with a major emergency. Besides, there was no doubt but that this L'payr, ameboid master criminal, had had punishment deferred far too long. In fact, one might say that mor-

ally I was completely and absolutely in the right.

Pah-Chi-Luh returned to Earth, as I've said, this time disguised as an editorial assistant. He got a job in the publishing house that had brought out the biology textbook. The original photographs were still in the files of that establishment. By picking his man carefully and making a good many mind-stimulating comments, the stellar corporal finally inspired one of the technical editors to examine the photographs and have the material on which they were printed analyzed.

The material was *frab*, a synthetic textile much in use on Gtet and not due to be developed by humanity for at least three centuries.

In no time at all, almost every woman in America was wearing lingerie made of *frab*, the novelty fabric of the year. And since L'payr was ultimately responsible for this illegal technological spurt, we at last had him where we wanted him!

He was very sporting about it, Hoy.

"The end of a long road for me, Sergeant," he said resignedly. "I congratulate you. Crime does not pay. Lawbreakers always lose."

"Right," I agreed. "About time you learned that."

I WENT off to prepare the extradition forms, without a care in the Galaxy. There was Blatch, of course, but he was only a human. And by this time, having gotten involved in all kinds of questionable dealings myself, I was determined to make quick work of him. After all, one might as well get blasted for a *skreek* as a *launt!*

But when I returned to escort the Gtetan to his fellow-ameboids, I almost fell through the surface of Pluto. Where there had been one L'payr, there were now two! Smaller L'payrs, of course —half the size of the original, to be exact—but L'payrs unmistakably.

In the interval, he had reproduced!

How? That gargle the Earthman had demanded, Hoy. It had been L'payr's idea all along, his last bit of insurance. Once the Earthman had received the gargle, he had smuggled it to L'payr, who had hidden it in his cell, intending to use it as a last resort.

That gargle, Hoy, was *salt water!*

So there I was. The Gtetans informed me tbat their laws covered such possibilities, but much help *their* laws were to me.

"A crime has been committed, pornography bas been sold," the spokesman reiterated. "We de-

mand our prisoner. Both of him!"

"Pursuant to Galactic Statutes 6,009,371 through 6,106,514," Osborne Blatch insisted, "I demand immediate release, restitution to the extent of two billion Galactic Megawbars, a complete and written—"

And . . .

"It's probably true that our ancester, L'payr, committed all sorts of indiscretions," lisped one of the two young ameboids in the cell next to Osborne Blatch, "but what does that have to do with us? L'payr paid for his crimes by dying in childbirth. We are young and innocent. Don't tell us the big, powerful Galaxy believes in punishing little children for the sins of their parents!"

What would *you* have done?

I shipped the whole mess off to Patrol Headquarters — the Gtetan extradition party and their mess of judicial citations, Osborne Blatch and his umbrella, the biology textbook, the original bundle of pornographic pictures, and last but not at all least, two —count 'em, two—dewy young ameboids. Call them L'payr sub-one and L'payr sub-two. Do anything you like with them when they get there, but please don't tell me what it is!

And if you can figure out a solution with the aid of some of the more ancient and wiser heads at headquarters, and figure it out before the Old One ruptures a gloccistomorph, Pah - Chi - Luh and I will be pathetically, eternally grateful.

If not—well, we're standing by here at Outlying Patrol Office 1001625 with bags p a c k e d. There's something to be said for the Black Hole in Cygnus—invaluable experience for a Patrolman.

Personally, Hoy, I'd say that the whole trouble is caused by creatures who insist on odd and colorful methods of continuing their race, instead of doing it sanely and decently by means of spore-pod explosion!

—WILLIAM TENN

It is time to move on when a pioneer sees someone's smoke —or rador—over the horizon!

Subsistence Level

By FINN O'DONNEVAN

Illustrated by KOSSIN

HER mother had warned her. "Are you out of your mind, Amelia? Why in heaven's name must you marry a *pioneer?* How do you expect to be happy in a wilderness?"

"The Cap isn't a wilderness, Mother," Amelia had said.

"It isn't civilized. It's a crude, primitive place. And how long will this *pioneer* be satisfied there? I know the type. He'll always want some new place to conquer."

"Then I'll conquer it with him," Amelia had said, certain of her own pioneering spirit.

Her mother wasn't so sure. "Frontier life is hard, dear. Harder than you imagine. Are you really prepared to give up your friends, all the comforts you've known?"

"Yes!"

Her mother wanted to say more. But since her husband's death, she had become less certain of her own convictions, less determined to impose them on others.

"It's your life," she said at last.

"Don't worry, Mother, I know what I'm doing," Amelia said.

She knew that Dirk Bogren couldn't stand crowding. He was a big man and he needed elbow room, and silence, and free air to breathe. He had told her about his father, who had set-

tled in the newly reclaimed Gobi Desert. It broke the old man's heart when the place got so crowded that land had to be fenced in according to county regulations and he died with his face turned toward the stars.

That was Dirk, too. She married him, and moved to the desolate Southern Polar Cap.

But settlers came after them, and soon the Cap was called Cap City, and then it had stores and factories, and neat little suburbs stretching across the atom-heated land.

It happened sooner than she ever expected.

ONE evening they were sitting on the veranda, and Dirk was looking over his land. He stared for a long time at the tip of a radar tower on a distant rise of the land.

"Getting crowded around here," he said finally.

"Yes, it is—a little," Amelia agreed.

"They'll be building a golf course next. Figure it's time to move on?"

"All right," Amelia said, after the slightest hesitation. And that was all that had to be said.

They sold their farm. They bought a second-hand spaceship and filled it with the barest necessities of life. The evening before blastoff, Dirk's friends threw a farewell party for him.

They were the old inhabitants and they could remember when the Cap was still partly ice and snow. They kidded Dirk, half enviously.

"Going to the asteroids, eh?"

"That's the place," Dirk said.

"But you're soft!" an old man cackled. "Easy living's got you, Dirk."

"Oh, I don't know."

"Think you can still work an honest five-hour day?"

Dirk grinned and drank his beer, and listened to the women give Amelia advice.

"Take *plenty* of warm things. *I remember* on *Mars*—"

"First-aid equipment—"

"The trouble with low gravity—"

"Dirk!" a man shouted. "You taking a pretty little thing like her to an *asteroid?*"

"Sure," Dirk said.

"She won't like it," another man warned. "No parties, no new clothes, no doodads."

"Folks go crazy from overwork out there."

"Don't you believe them," an older woman put in hastily. "You'll love it once you get used to it."

"I'm sure I will," Amelia said politely and hoped it was true.

Just before blastoff, she called her mother and told her the news.

Her mother wasn't surprised.

"Well, dear," she said, "it won't be easy. But you knew that before you married him. The asteroids—that's where your father wanted to go."

Amelia remembered her father as a gentle, soft-spoken man. Every night, when he returned from the bank, he would read through the ads for used spaceships and he would compile detailed lists of the equipment an explorer would need. Mother was dead set against any change and would not be moved. There were few open arguments, but a bitterness existed beneath the surface—until all bitterness was resolved when a helicopter smashed into her father's car one day, when he was returning from the bank.

"Try to be a good wife to him," her mother urged.

"Of course I will," Amelia declared a little angrily.

THE new frontiers were in space, for Earth was tame and settled now. Dirk had studied the available charts of the Asteroid Belt, but they didn't tell him much. No one had ever penetrated very far and the vast extent was simply marked UNKNOWN TERRITORY.

It was a long journey and a dangerous one, but free land was there, land for the taking, and all the room a man could ask. Dirk fought through the shifting patterns of rock with steady patience. The spaceship was always pointed implacably outward, though no route was marked.

"We're not turning back," he told Amelia, "so there's no sense charting a way."

She nodded agreement, but her breath came short when she looked at the bleak, dead spots of light ahead. She couldn't help feeling apprehensive about their new life, the grim, lonely existence of the frontier. She shivered and put her hand over Dirk's.

He smiled, never taking his eyes off the dials.

They found a slab of rock several miles long by a mile wide. They landed on the dark, airless little world, set up their pressure dome and turned on the gravity. As soon as it approached normal, Dirk set to work uncrating the Control Robot. It was a long, tiring job, but finally he inserted the tape and activated the controls.

The robot went to work. Dirk turned on all available searchlights. Using the small crane, he lifted their Frontier Shelter out of the ship's hold, placed it near the center of the dome, and activated it. The Shelter opened like a gigantic flower, blossoming into a neat five-room

dwelling, complete with basic furniture, kitchen, plumbing, and disposal units.

It was a start. But everything couldn't be unpacked at once. The temperature control was buried somewhere in the hold of the ship, and Dirk had to warm their house with an auxiliary heater hooked to the generator.

Amelia was too cold to make dinner. The temperature in the Shelter hovered around 52 degrees Fahrenheit. Even in her Explorers, Inc., furs, she was cold, and the dismal glow of the fluorescents made her feel colder.

"Dirk," she asked timidly, "couldn't you make it a little warmer?"

"I suppose I could, but that would slow down the robot."

"I didn't know," Amelia said. "I'll be all right."

But it was impossible working under fluorescents and she set the dial wrong on the Basic Ration Pack. The steak came out overdone, the potatoes were lumpy, and the chill was barely taken off the apple pie.

"I'm afraid I'm not much good at roughing it," Amelia said, trying to smile.

"Forget it," Dirk told her, and wolfed down his food as though it were regular Earthside fare.

They turned in. Amelia could hardly sleep on the emergency mattress. But she had the dubious satisfaction of knowing that Dirk was uncomfortable, too. He *had* been softened by the relatively easy life at the Cap.

WHEN they awoke, everyseemed more cheerful. The Control Robot, working through the night, had set up the main lighting plant. Now they had their own little sun in the sky and a fair approximation of night and day. The Control had also unloaded the heavy Farm Robots, and they in turn had unloaded the Household Robots.

Dirk directed the topsoil manufacturing and coordinated the work of his robots as they force-seeded the soil. He worked a full five-hour day, and when the little sun was low on the horizon, he came home exhausted.

Amelia, meanwhile, had taped in her basic food sequences during the day, and that evening she was able to give her husband a plain but hearty eight-course dinner.

"Of course, it's not the twenty-plate special," she apologized as he munched on the hors d'oeuvres.

"Never could eat all that food, anyhow," Dirk said.

"And the wine isn't properly chilled."

Dirk looked up and grinned. "Hell, honey, I could drink

warm Ola-Cola and never notice it."

"Not while *I'm* cook here," Amelia said. But she could see one advantage of frontier life already—a hungry man would eat anything that was put in front of him.

After helping Amelia pile the dishes into the washer, Dirk set up a projector in their living room. As a double feature flicked across the screen, they sat in durable foam-rubber chairs, just as generations of pioneers before them had done. This continuity with the past touched Amelia deeply.

And Dirk unpacked their regular bed and adjusted the gravity under it. That night they slept as soundly as they ever had at the Cap.

But the work on the asteroid was ceaseless and unremitting. Dirk labored five and, several times, even six hours a day with his Field Robots, changing tapes, bellowing commands, sweating to get the best out of them. In a few days, the force-seeded plants began to show green against the synthesized black loam. But it was apparent at once that it was a stunted crop.

Dirk's mouth tightened and he set his robots to pumping trace elements into the soil. He tinkered with his sun until he he had increased its ultraviolet output. But the resulting crop, a week later, was a failure.

AMELIA came out to the fields that day. Dirk's face was outlined by the garish sunset and his clenched fists were on his hips. He was staring at the poor, dwarfed, shoulder-high corn.

There was nothing Amelia could say. She put her hand comfortingly on his shoulder.

"We're not licked," Dirk muttered.

"What will you do?" Amelia asked.

"I'll plant a crop a week, if need be. I'll work the robots until their joints crystallize. This soil will yield. It must yield!"

Amelia stepped back, surprised at the vehemence of his tone. But she could understand how he felt. On Earth, a farmer simply gave the orders to his Control Robot, and in a few days he was ready to harvest. Dirk had been working and watching this miserable crop for over a week.

"What will you do with it?" she asked.

"Feed it to the animals," Dirk said contemptuously. They walked to the house together in the gathering twilight.

The next day, Dirk took his farm animals out of the freezers, reanimated them, and set

up their pens and stalls. The beasts fed contentedly on the corn and wheat. Force-seeds went back into the ground—and the second growing was of normal size.

Amelia had little time to observe this triumph. Their five-room dwelling was small by Earth standards, but it still needed coordinating.

It was difficult. She had grown up in an ordinary suburban home, where the housekeeping duties were arranged in automatic time sequences. Here, each function was handled by an individual machine. There was no time to recess them into the walls and they were forever in the way, ruining her decor, making the house look like a machine shop.

Instead of a single, centralized switchboard, Amelia had dials, buttons and switches everywhere, jury-rigged in casual style. At first, she had to spend a large part of each day just hunting for the proper controls for dry-cleaning, floor-scrubbing, window-washing, and other necessities she had taken for granted at home. Dirk had promised to hook all the circuits together, but he was always busy with bis own work.

Her House Robots were impossible. They were frontier models, built for durability, with none of the refinements she had known. Their memories were poor and they could anticipate nothing. At the end of the day, Amelia's ears would ring from their harsh, raucous voices. And most of tbe time her house looked as though the robots had been attacking it, instead of cleaning it.

THE long five-hour days of drudgery went on and on, until Amelia felt she couldn't take any more of it. In desperation, she called her mother on the tele-circuit.

In the tiny, streaked screen, she could see her mother sitting in her favorite pneumo-chair beside the polarized glass wall. It was adjusted for vision now, and Amelia could see the city in the distance, springing upward in its glistening beauty.

"What seems to be wrong?" her mother asked.

A robot glided behind her mother's chair and noiselessly put down a cup of tea. Amelia was sure that no command had been given. The sensitive mechanical had anticipated her, the way Earth robots did after long acquaintance with a family.

"Well, it's—" Amelia began to explain almost hysterically.

Her own robot lurched through the room, almost breaking down a door when the photo-electric

circuit didn't respond quickly enough. It was too much.

"I want to come home!" Amelia cried.

"You know you're always welcome, dear. But what about your husband?"

"Dirk will come, I'm sure of it. We can find him a good job, can't we, Mother?"

"I suppose so. But is that what he wants?"

"What?" Amelia asked blankly.

"Will a man like that be satisfied on Earth? Will he return?"

"He will if he loves me."

"Do you love him?"

"Mother, that's unfair!" Amelia said, feeling a little sick inside.

"It's a mistake to make a man do something he doesn't want to do," her mother told her. "Your father . . . Anyhow, don't you think you could make it work?"

"I don't know," Amelia said. "I guess—I guess I'll try."

Things did get better after that. Amelia learned how to live with her home, to overlook its inconveniences. She could see that someday it might be as pleasant as they had eventually made their farm on the Cap.

But they had left the Cap. And as soon as this place was livable, Dirk would want to move on, into a fresh wilderness.

One day, Dirk found her sitting beside their tiny swimming pool, weeping hopelessly.

"Hey!" he said. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

Clumsily he stroked her hair. "Tell me."

"Nothing, nothing."

"*Tell* me."

"Oh, it's all the work of making a nice home and putting up curtains and training the robots and everything, and knowing—"

"Knowing what?"

"That someday you'll want to move on and it'll all be for nothing." She sat up and tried to smile. "I'm sorry, Dirk. I shouldn't have mentioned it."

DIRK thought for a long time. Then he looked at her closely, and said, "I want to make you happy. You believe that, don't you?"

She nodded.

"I guess we've done enough moving around. This is our home. We'll stay right here."

"Really, Dirk?"

"It's a promise."

She hugged him tightly. Then she remembered. "Good heavens! My Napoleons will be ruined!" She ran off to the kitchen.

The next weeks were the happiest Amelia had ever known. In the morning, their pre-set sun

burst into glory, waking them to the morning chores. After they had a hearty breakfast, the work of the day began.

It was never dull. One day Amelia and Dirk might erect a meteor screen to reinforce their pressure dome. Or they might tinker with the wind machine, to help the reanimated bees provide better pollination for the crops.

In the evenings, they had their sunsets. Sometimes Dirk would have the Field Robots stage a clumsy dance. He was a firm but understanding master. He believed that a litle variety was good for rohots as well as for humans.

Amelia regretted Earth only once. That was when Dirk picked up a Lunar rehroadcast of the Easter Parade on their television set. The music and bright colors made Amelia's heart ache — hut it was only for a moment.

Their first visitor came several months later in a gaily decorated spaceship that settled on Dirk's rough-hewn landing field. Painted on its side in letters eight feet high was the sign POTTER'S TRAVELING STORE. A dapper young man climbed out, sniffed the atmosphere, wrinkled his nose, and walked up to the house.

"What can I do for you, stranger?" Dirk asked at the door.

"Good day, countryman. I'm Potter," the young man said, extending his hand which Dirk did not shake. "I was making my usual swing around Mars when I heard about you folks out here. Thought you might like to buy a few gimcracks to —to hrighten up the place."

"Don't want a thing," Dirk said.

Potter grinned amiahly, hut he had seen the severe, undecorated farmhouse and the apartan swimming pool.

"Something for the wife?" Potter asked, winking at Amelia. "I won't be around this way for a while."

"Glad to hear it," Dirk said.

But Amelia, her eyes glowing, wanted to go through Potter's whole stock, and she dragged Dirk along.

LIKE a child, she tried out all the household appliances, the modern time-saving gadgets for the home. She looked longingly at the dresses—dainty, sheer, with automatic necklines and hems—and thought of her own drah tailored fashions.

But then she saw the Acting Robots. With their amazingly human appearance and civilized mannerisms, they reminded her poignantly of home.

"Couldn't we buy a troupe?" she asked Dirk.

"We've got the movies, haven't we? They were good enough for my father—"

"But, Dirk, these robots put on real plays!"

"This particular troupe puts on all bit plays clear back to George Bernard Shaw," Potter told them.

Dirk looked with distaste at the handsome humanoid machines. "What else do they do?"

"Do? They act," Potter said. "Good Lord, countryman, you wouldn't expect a work of art to do farm labor, would you?"

"Why not?" Dirk asked. "I don't believe in pampering robots. Farm labor's good enough for my Control Robot and I'll bet he's smarter than these gimcracks."

"Your Control Robot is not an artist," Potter said loftily.

Amelia was so wistful that Dirk bought the troupe. While he was lugging them to the house—Acting Robots were too delicate to walk over stony ground—Amelia bought a dress.

"What's a girl like you doing in this wilderness?" Potter asked.

"I like it."

"Oh, it's livable, I suppose. Life of toil, doing without luxuries, advancing the frontier, all that sort of thing. But don't you get sick of roughing it?"

Amelia didn't answer him.

Potter shrugged his shoulders. "Well," he said, "this sector's ripe for colonization. You'll be having company before long."

Amelia took her dress and returned to the house. Potter blasted off.

Dirk was forced to admit the Acting Robots made pleasant company during the long, still evenings. He even became quite fond of *Man and Superman*. After a while, he began to give the robots acting directions, which they naturally ignored.

Still, he was always certain that his Control Robot could do as well, if the voice box were only improved a little.

Amusements, however, were swallowed in the long five-hour working days. Dirk began to collect other little asteroids and grapple them to his original claim. He force-planted a forest, constructed a waterfall, and tinkered with his father's old climate machine.

Finally he got it working and was able to reproduce seasons on their planetoid.

ONE day, the tele-circuit spluttered into life and Dirk received a spacegram. It was from Explorers, Inc., an Earth firm that manufactured a complete line of equipment for pioneers. They offered Dirk a job

as head of their main testing laboratory, at a salary just a little short of stupendous.

"Oh, Dirk!" Amelia gasped. "What an opportunity!"

"Opportunity? What are you talking about?"

"You could be wealthy. You could have anything you wanted."

"I've got what I want," Dirk said. "Tell them no, thanks."

Amelia sighed wearily. She cabled Dirk's refusal to the firm—but added that his services might possibly be available later.

After all, there was no sense in completely shutting the door.

DURING the long summer, another spaceship swung over Dirk's landing field. This one was older and even more battered than Dirk's, and it dropped the last five feet to the ground, jarring the whole small planetoid. A young couple staggered out, on the point of collapse.

They were Jean and Percy Phillips, who had bomesteaded several thousand miles from Dirk's holdings. Everything had gone wrong. Their power had failed, their robots had broken down, their food had run out. In desperation, they had set out for Dirk's farm. They were near starvation, having been without food for almost two whole days.

Dirk and Amelia gave them the hospitality of the frontier and quickly nursed them back to health. It became readily apparent that the Phillipses were ignorant of any of the rules of survival.

Percy Phillips didn't even know how to handle robots. Dirk had to explain it to him.

"You have to show them who's boss," Dirk said.

"But I should think that the proper command, given in a low, pleasant voice—"

"Not out here," Dirk said, with a positive shake of his head. "These Work Robots are a stupid, unresponsive lot. They're sullen and resentful. You have to *pound* the commands into them. Kick them, if need be."

Phillips raised both eyebrows. "Mistreat a robot?"

"You have to show them who the human is."

"But in Colonization School, we were taught to treat our robots with dignity," Phillips protested.

"You'll lose a lot of Earth notions out here," Dirk said bluntly. "Now listen to me. I was raised by robots. Some of my best friends are robots. I know what I'm talking about. The only way they'll show you

any respect is if you make them."

PHILLIPS admitted doubtfully that Dirk might be right.

"Of course I'm right!" Dirk stated. "You say your power supply failed?"

"Yes, but the robots didn't—"

"Didn't they? They have access to the charge outlets, haven't they?"

"Of course. When they're low, they recharge themselves."

"You think they stop when they're full? A robot'll keep on drawing power until it's all gone. Haven't you learned that old robot stunt?"

"I guess that's what happened," Phillips said. "But why would they do it?"

"Robots are congenital drunks," Dirk told him. "The manufacturers stamp it into them. That way, they burn out faster and you have to buy more robots. Believe me, you'll be doing them a favor if you keep them power-starved."

"I guess I've got a lot to learn," Phillips sighed.

And Jean, his wife, had even more to learn. Amelia had to show her over and over again that buttons won't push themselves, switches won't close without timing circuits, and dials won't leap of their own free will to the proper setting. Cleaning Robots can't be trusted with the cooking, and the Rub-A-Tub, although a versatile instrument, *won't* put up the preserves.

"I never thought there was so much to it," Jean said. "How do you do it all?"

"You'll learn," Amelia assured her, remembering her own early days on the frontier.

The Phillipses set out again for their claim. Amelia had thought it would be lonely when they were gone, but it was pleasant to be alone with Dirk again, to get back to work on their farm.

But people wouldn't leave them alone. Next, a man from Mars Rural Power called. Homesteaders were moving into the Asteroid Belt, he explained, so the power outlets were being extended. He wanted to hook up Dirk's farm to the Mars Power tight-beam network.

"Nope," Dirk said.

"Why not? It's not expensive—"

"I make my own power."

"Oh, these little generators," the man said, looking scornfully at Dirk's sun. "But for really high-gain performance—"

"Don't need it. This farm runs fast enough to suit me."

"You could get more work out of your robots."

"Just wear them out faster."

"Then you could get the latest models."

"The new ones just burn out faster."

"A better generating system, then," the man said. "That little sun of yours doesn't have much of an output."

"Puts out enough to satisfy me."

The man shook his head wonderingly. "I guess I'll never understand you pioneers," he said, and left.

THEY tried to resume their life. But lights were beginning to wink on from neighboring asteroids, and the Lunar television was jammed with local signals. The mail rocket began to make weekly stops and a travel bureau started trips into the Belt.

The familiar, dissatisfied look came over Dirk's face. He studied the sky around him. It was closing in. He was losing his elbow room, and the silence of his farm was broken by the flame of passing rockets.

But he had promised Amelia and he was going to keep that promise if it killed him. His face grew gaunt and he began to work six, seven—sometimes actually eight—hours a day.

A sewing machine salesman called, and a bright, determined woman tried to sell Dirk the Solar Encyclopedia. The ship routes were established now and the long, dangerous trail had become a superhighway.

One night, while Dirk and Amelia were sitting on their porch, they saw an immense sign light up the sky. It stretched over miles of space, and read: ROSEN'S SHOPPING CENTER. STORES, RESTAURANT, BEST DRINKS IN THE ASTEROIDS.

"Stores," Amelia murmured. "And a restaurant! Oh, Dirk, couldn't we go?"

"Why not?" he said, with a helpless shrug of his shoulders.

The next day, Amelia put on her new dress and made Dirk wear his one custom-tailored suit. They got into the old spaceship and set out.

Rosen's Center, a bustling frontier town sprawling across four linked asteroids, was struggling valiantly to become a city. Already driftways had been installed on all the streets. The town was filled with noisy, eager people, and robots clumped down the ways, loaded with gear.

Amelia took Dirk into a restaurant, where they were served a real Earthside dinner. Dirk didn't enjoy it. He was slightly nauseous from breathing other people's air and the food was too delicate to stick to one's ribs.

The meal ended with Dirk ordering the wrong wine and trying to tip the robot waiter.

Thoroughly miserable, he allowed himself to be dragged from one store to another. The only time he showed any interest was when they entered a heavy-tools shop.

He examined a new anti-gravity engine. It was a model he had never seen.

"Just the thing for canceling heavy-planet effects," the robot clerk told him. "We believe this machine would work splendidly on the moons of Jupiter, for example."

"The moons of Jupiter?"

"Just an example, sir," the robot said. "No one's ever been there. It's completely unexplored territory."

DIRK nodded absently, rubbing his hand along the machine's burnished surface.

"Look, Amelia," he said. "Do you suppose that job on Earth is still open?"

"It might be," she answered. "Why?"

"Might as well be on Earth as here. These people are playing at pioneering."

"Do you think you'd be happy on Earth?"

"Might."

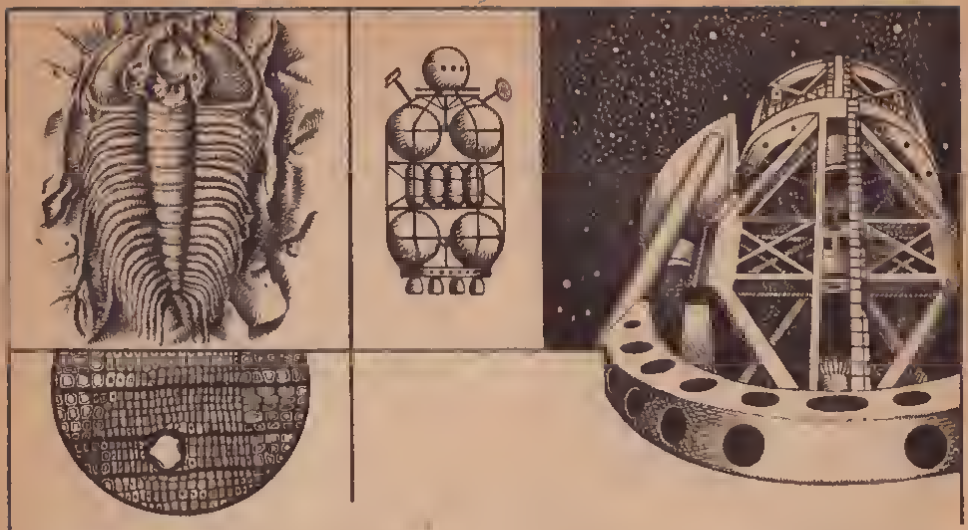
"I doubt it," Amelia said. She was remembering how contented they had been on the asteroid. Their life had been full and complete, just the two of them, pushing back the wilderness with their rude tools—doing without—improvising.

That had been before people came, before Earth's noisy, elbowing civilization had crowded up to their doorstep.

Her mother had learned the hard way and had tried to tell her. Dirk would never be happy on Earth. And happiness for her was impossible if he fretted his life away as her father had, working on a job he hated and dreaming of another more satisfying one.

"We'll take the anti-grav engine," she told the robot. She turned to Dirk. "We'll need that out Jupiter way."

—FINN O'DONNEVAN



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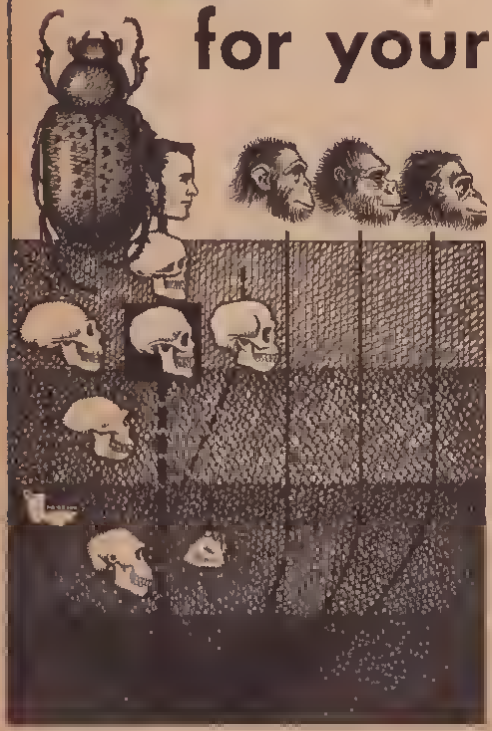


MAIL BY ROCKET

EARLIER this year, the aviation magazines carried a short official announcement to the effect that a committee had been appointed to study the feasibility of using guided missiles for peacetime service as robot mail vehicles.

This announcement must have struck many people as a brand-new idea. Actually, it is one of those ideas that have been around

for quite a while in a kind of embryonic form and are now approaching realization. The earliest type of missile mail is one you've probably seen in historical movies—the parchment wrapped around the shaft of an arrow, tied securely and shot into the castle, or out of it, depending on the plot of the story.

A more modern version of the same idea was presented to an astonished and presumably incredulous readership in 1810 by a long defunct newspaper, the Berlin *Evening News* (*Berliner Abendblätter*). If it had been written by an otherwise unknown newspaperman of that period, nobody might remember it any more; but it so happens that the author was a still respected German poet of the time. His name was Heinrich von Kleist and he was the editor of that paper.

The issue of October 10, 1810, carried under the general heading of "Useful Inventions" an article entitled "Preliminary Thoughts about Mortar Mail." It began by stating that an electrical telegraph had been recently invented, but fast as it was, it could only transmit very brief messages, being wholly inadequate for the transmission of letters, reports, miscellaneous enclosures and packages. This, the article continued, could be remedied by the introduction of a system that ought to work "at least within the confines of the civilized world."

If one established a number of fixed batteries of mortars or howitzers within range of each other and all located on soft ground, these batteries could fire letter-filled shells from station to station. "As a quick computation will show," the author went on, a letter dispatched by this means would cover the distance from Berlin to Stettin (75 miles) or to Breslau (180 miles) in half a day or in about one-tenth the time required by a mounted courier.

THE next issue of the paper carried a letter by a "resident of the city"—presumably the editor—which states that the writer considers neither the electric telegraph nor the mortar mail as "useful inventions." Since most news is bad news, a really useful invention would be one which slows the mails down; ox-cart mail might be the proper solution to the problem. Whether Heinrich von Kleist was merely trying to amuse himself and his readers or whether bis slightly mocking style was designed as camouflage for some wishful ideas in the back of his mind is something nobody will ever be able to establish. At any event, no mortar mail was ever tried.

But later in the nineteenth century, something that looks more modern by far was actually done—in the South Seas, there was a genuine rocket mail.

The rockets used were very large blackpowder missiles of the Congreve type; the place where they carried mail canisters was the Tonga Islands to the south of Samoa. By air, the rockets bridged difficult reefs. But since quite a number of canisters were never found and others split open on impact, so that the sea water ruined the mail, this experiment did not last long. It was discarded in favor of "buoy mail," which was somewhat more reliable.

The missile-mail idea was shelved until modern rocket theory came along three decades ago. Interestingly enough, however, of the two classical works which started rocket theory, neither Dr. Robert H. Goddard's study of 1920 nor Professor Hermann Oberth's long paper of 1923 says a word about mail transportation by rocket. This notion occurred to Oberth in 1927 in the course of correspondence with one Dr. Franz von Hoefft, who was then president of the Austrian Rocket Society. It assumed definite shape for the first time in a lecture delivered by Professor Oberth during the first days of June 1928, on the occasion of the annual meeting of the Scientific Society for Aeronautics in Danzig.

The manuscript for the lecture contains the following statement, never before published in English:

> I would suggest, therefore, to begin with the building of small rockets witb automatic guidance that can bridge distances from 600-1200 miles and carry a payload of 22-44 lbs. Several factors that I cannot discuss now because of lack of time happen to facilitate the automatic guidance of a rocket so that, in my opinion, it should be possible to pre-determine the place at which the rocket returns into the atmosphere with an uncertainty of only a few miles.
>
> This rocket, therefore, seems suitable for transporting urgent mail over long distances in a very short time. Tbe rocket would have to land by means of a parachute; some other means of transportation would then carry the apparatus to its precise destination. At a later date, I would equip such a rocket with a powerful booster that would result in transoceanic ranges. The booster rocket would drop off after one minute and should be easy to locate.

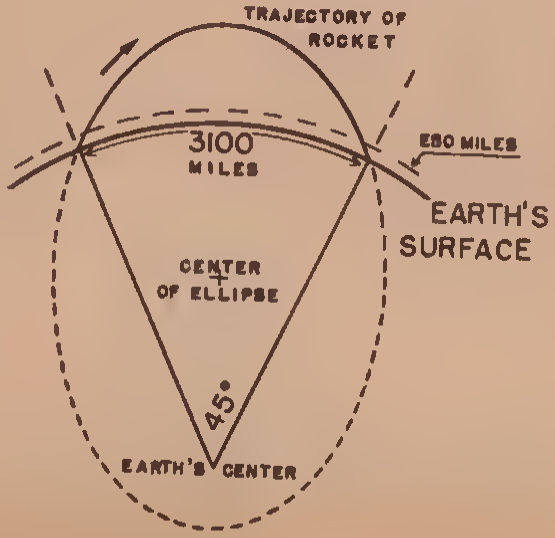
AFTER this lecture, it became customary among rocket enthusiasts to consider the mail-carrying rocket the "second step in rocket development." The first step, following preliminary and purely experimental models, would be the high-altitude instrument-carrying research rocket, vertically rising; the second

step, the long-range rocket with a payload consisting of mail. When it looked, in 1929, as if an early prototype of the high altitude research rocket would be realized very soon, a German journalist interviewed the American Ambassador, Dr. Shurman, about his attitude toward transatlantic rocket mail.

Ambassador Shurman wisely refrained from having opinions about technological detail. "Just two years ago," he told the journalist, "the chair you are sitting in was occupied by Dr. Eckener of the Zeppelin works, who talked to me about transatlantic mail by dirigible." But the Ambassador did give an opinion on the legal procedure required.

If it had been proved, he said, that the rocket would not represent any danger to life or limb or the property of American citizens, the proper thing to do would be to ask for permission at the U. S. Embassy. The Ambassador would then forward this request by cable to the Department of State, the Department of State would pass it on to the President, and the President would call a cabinet meeting, which would make the final decision on the matter.

How such a transatlantic mail shot would have looked, and would still look, is shown in Fig. 1. After initial vertical takeoff, the rocket would climb out of the atmosphere at a slant, reach a rather great height at the mid-

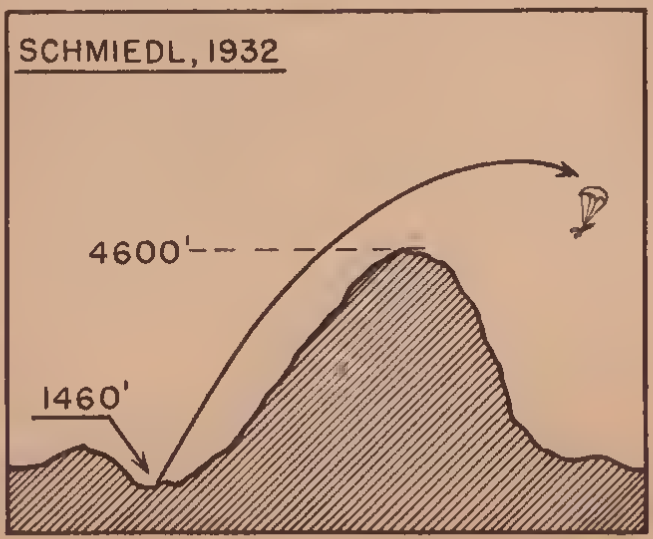


way point, and dip into the atmosphere again 35 minutes later, more than 3000 miles from its takeoff point. (The distance shown on the diagram is the Great Circle distance between New York and Cobh.)

Everything the newspapers told during 1929, from the announcement of the first forthcoming high-altitude shot to 40 miles to the interview with the Ambassador, sounded most impressive, but unfortunately things got stuck at that point. The first long-range rocket did not lift off its launching table until 13 years later and then it was slated to carry a payload of high explosive, instead of mail, good or bad. In this instance, the news was bad—in England.

DURING those 13 years, the story of the idea of the mail rocket described a strange curlicue. The theoreticians of the mail rocket, with a large expenditure of long equations, had always been thinking in terms of oceans, deserts and steppes.

In 1931, a very young Austrian engineer by the name of Freidrich Schmiedl had quietly established still another possibility. Living in the Austrian Alps, he was aware of the fact that two villages might be eight hours' walk from each other, yet less than two miles away as the rocket flies. He had built half a dozen experimental rockets, had tinkered himself a reliable parachute release system, and on the second of February, 1931, he had



put 102 letters into a compartment of his seventh rocket and fired it across a mountain. After another experimental shot, there followed a rocket labeled R-1 with 333 letters and then, through the year 1932, five others.

Rocket R-1 stood 5.6 feet tall, had a largest diameter (near the head) of 9.6 inches, a smallest diameter (at the tail end) of 9.25 inches, had an empty weight of 15.4 lbs. and was propelled by a charge of 52.8 lbs. of a special blackpowder mixture. It was made of several layers of thin sheet brass, wound, for strength, with twine soaked in hot carpenters glue. The outside skin was sheet aluminum and between the charge and the sheet brass there was a layer of asbestos. The purpose of the asbestos was to minimize heat conduction forward through the metal skin. Without this precaution, such conducted heat might ignite the still unburned front end of the charge and cause an explosion.

Schmiedl's experiments demonstrated that the old Tonga Islands problem of shooting at short range over obstacles (mountains, in his case) was still very much alive. One could also think of a few possible applications where there was no real obstacle, but a special set of circumstances. For example, a ship coming from America might pass the extreme western end of England, Land's End, within rocket range, but would not berth in an English port for another 12 hours—or even later if, as is often done, the first port of call is a French harbor. The mail could then arrive ahead of the ship.

Schmiedl's mail shots were imitated (usually less successfully) in many other countries, such as Germany, England, Holland, the U.S.A., Cuba, India and Australia. The bill was usually footed by stamp collectors who, in the hope of future rocket mail, wanted to accumulate "forerunners."

Then came the second World War, bringing the military bombardment rocket, which, from this point of view, might be considered a highly efficient and mass-produced short-range "obstacle rocket." And it brought the first real long-range rocket. But it failed to produce the mail rocket, unless you want to count the use of bombardment rockets for showering leaflets on the enemy under this heading.

IT is a rather safe prediction to say that the long-range mail rocket will not become a reality in the form in which it was talked about in 1929. There are two main reasons. One is political. As things stand right now, no

government could dare to permit international mail transportation hy long-range rocket. If such rockets began to show on the radar screen of the receiving station, the radar operator—and everybody else concerned—would wonder whether they really carried mail. They might not even come from the announced firing site.

The second reason is that the transatlantic timetahle has undergone a fundamental change. At the time when the American Ambassador was asked about his opinions, the reasoning ran as follows:

The rocket would need about ½ hour for the actual trip across the Atlantic. If you counted on one hour's delay at the European (or firing) end and about 1½ hour's delay at the receiving end where the rocket had to be fished out of the water and the mail sorted, a letter might make the trip from "house to house" in three hours. Since the time difference between Berlin and New York is six hours, it would even look as if the addressee received his mail three hours *before* it was mailed.

Even assuming only four mail rockets per day, it was virtually certain that the majority of the letters would reach the addresses on the day they were mailed. Compared to the steamer schedule, which involved an interval hetween mailing and delivery of at least one week, this was a nice and prohahly important time-saving.

But the mail plane needs only ahout eight hours to cross the ocean. Recently, my German puhlisher wrote me an airmail letter on a Friday and had my reply the following Monday, without special delivery at either end. Less than two years from now, the transatlantic mail planes will be turbojets requiring, say, six hours for the flight. And another two years later, this time might he reduced to five or even four hours. The long-range unmanned mail rocket has been effectively killed off hy the fast long-range manned airplane.

THE mail-carrying missile, however, is a different story. It might he useful to mention at this point that all missiles, no matter how large their number, can be sorted into just two categories.

One type of missile is the real rocket, which does not rely on the air for "lift" the way an airplane does. In fact, the rocket missile tries to get out of at least the denser layers of the atmosphere as quickly as can he managed in order to gain maximum speed, because a real rocket operates at full efficiency only in a

vacuum. Like an artillery shell, it moves along a trajectory, and this group of missiles is therefore referred to as "trajectory missiles."

The other group of missiles is winged, aerodyhamically supported like an airplane, and "flies" like an airplane. It does not follow a trajectory, but a flight path, and these aerodynamically supported missiles are therefore known as "flight-path missiles" or "cruising missiles."

The V-2 rocket is a true trajectory missile. Tbe old German V-1 or buzz bomb and its offspring, the Navy *Loon* and the Martin *Matador*, are typical cruising missiles.

Of course, no cruising missile can compete with a trajectory missile when it comes to speed. But as mail carriers, they have a number of undoubted advantages.

Unlike the trajectory missile, they are controlled (or at least can be controlled) every inch of the way. Since they have wings, they can be landed like an airplane, on an airport where postal facilities already exist. They can even be "held" in the air for a short time, if necessary. Their speed can be mucb higher than that of commercial transports and rivals that of the fastest fighters. They can, if used as mail carriers, be used over and over again.

If they are built for comparatively small payloads, say ¼ ton, they could be launched at frequeot intervals. And their operation may be cheap enough so that the rates for missile mail might be not more than perhaps triple the airmail rate.

What will actually happen will depend on the studies now under way. As of now, it looks as if a famous French saying might be adapted to read: *La fusée postale est morte; vive le projectile postal!*

ANY QUESTIONS?

Is there any basic distinction between plants and animals that also holds true for all one-celled organisms?

D. Shafer
1910 *Andina Avenue*
Cincinnati 37,Ohio

The basic distinetion between animals and plants is that plants have chlorophyll while animals do not. There is no animal with chlorophyll; examples in older texthooks were mistakes, caused by algae living in symbiosis with the organisms in question. Unfortunately, as far as orderly pigeon-holing is conecrned, a numher of plants have decided to live on organic matter and have done

away with their chlorophyll. So to make the distinction apply in all cases, one would have to say that animals are organisms that cannot have chlorophyll, while plants are organisms that can and usually do. This will apply to anything larger than a virus, to which nothing seems to apply.

Would you please explain how the Moon rotates keeping always one face toward the Earth? Also, why Mercury always keeps one face toward the Sun?

Boyce Burgle
444 12th Street
Sparks, Nevada

Apparently many people have some difficulty visualizing how one celestial body can revolve around another one in such a manner that only one-half of the revolving body is visible from the central body. I have even been asked on occasion whether one should not say that neither the Moon nor Mercury rotates at all. They do rotate, however, and the problem can be best understood by making a little experiment.

Place a lamp on a table that has open space all around it. The lamp is the Earth and your head represents the Moon. Now if you move around the table, keeping your eyes fixed on some external point, such as a window, you revolve around the lamp (Earth) without rotating at all. The result is that the lamp will illuminate every portion of your head; translated into astronomical terms, this means that the people on the Earth could see every portion of the Moon in the course of one month.

But if you move around the table with your eyes always fixed on the lamp, you perform not only a revolution around the Earth, but also one rotation around your axis, since every portion of your head would become visible to another (stationary) observer in the same room.

All the moons in our solar system behave in this manner and, among the planets, Mercury, the one nearest the Sun. This is the inevitable result of the action of the gravitational field of a large body on a nearby small body. Naturally, since the time required for one revolution differs for the various moons of a planet with many moons, the periods required for their rotations differ, too, because they all have revolutionary periods equal to their rotational periods.

—WILLY LEY

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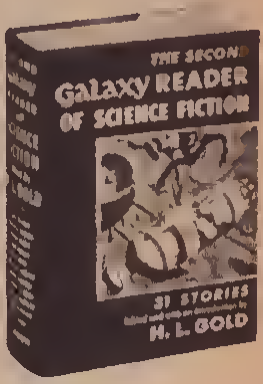

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The Impossible

"SPACE life expectancy has been increased to twenty-five months and six days," said Marlowe, the training director. "That's a gain of a full month."

Millions of miles from Earth, Ethan also looked discontentedly proud. "A mighty healthy-looking boy," he declared.

Demarest bent a paperweight ship until it snapped. "It's some-

The right question kept getting the wrong answer—but old Ethan and Amantha got the right answer by asking the wrong question!

Voyage Home

By F. L. WALLACE

thing. You're gaining on the heredity block. What's the chief factor?"

"Anti-radiation clothing. We just can't make them effective enough."

Across space, on distant Mars, Amantha reached for the picture. "How can you tell he ain't sickly? You can't see without glasses."

Ethan reared up. "Jimmy's

boy, ain't he? Our kids were always healthy, 'specially the youngest. Stands to reason their kids will be better."

"*Now you're thinking with your forgettery. They were all sick, one time or another. It was me who took care of them, though. You always could find ways of getting out of it.*" *Amantha touched the chair switch.*

The planets whirled around the Sun. Earth crept ahead of Mars, Venus gained on Earth. The flow of ships slackened or spurted forth anew, according to what destination could be reached at the moment:

"A month helps," said Demarest. "But where does it end? You can't enclose a man completely, and even if you do, there still is the air he breathes and food he eats. Radiation in space contaminates everything the body needs. And part of the radioactivity finds its way to the reproductive system."

MARLOWE didn't need to glance at the charts; the curve was beginning to flatten. Mathematically, it was determinable when it wouldn't rise at all. According to analysis, Man someday might be able to endure the radiation encountered in space as long as three years, if exposure times were spaced at intervals.

But that was in the future.

"There's a lot you could do," he told Demarest. "Shield the atomics."

"Working on it," commented Demarest. "But every ounce we add cuts down on the payload. The best way is to get the ship from one place to another faster. It's time in space that hurts. Less exposure time, more trips before the crew has to retire. It adds up to the same thing."

On Mars, Amantha fondled the picture. "*Pretty. But it ain't real.*" *She laid it aside.*

Ethan squinted at it. "*I could make you think it was. Get it enlarged, solidified. Have them make it soft, big as a baby. You could hold it in your lap.*"

"*Outgrew playthings years ago.*" *Amantha adjusted the chair switch, but the rocking motion was no comfort.*

Ethan turned the picture over, face down. "*Nope. Hate to back you up, 'Mantha, but it ain't the same. There's nothing like a baby, wettin' and squallin' and smilin', stubborn when it ought-n't to be and sweet and gentle when you don't expect it. Robodolls don't fool anybody who's ever held the real thing.*"

In the interval, Earth had drawn ahead. The gap between the two planets was widening.

"That's another fallacy," objected the training director. "The

body can stand just so much acceleration. We're near the limit. What good are faster ships?"

"That's your problem," said Demarest. "Get me tougher crewmen. Young, afraid of nothing, able to take it."

It always ended here—younger, tougher, the finest the race produced—and still not good enough. And after years of training, they had twenty-five months to function as spacemen. It was a precious thing, flight time, and each trip was as short as science could make it. Conjunction was the magic moment for those who went between the planets.

It was the heredity block that kept Man squeezed, confined to Earth, Mars and Venus, preventing him from ranging farther. The heredity block was a racial quantity, the germ plasm, but not just that. Crew and passengers were protected as much as possible from radiation encountered in space and that which originated in the ship's drive. The protection wasn't good enough. Prolonged exposure had the usual effects, sterilization or the production of deformed mutations.

Man was the product of evolution on a planet. He didn't step out into space without payment.

THE radiation that damaged genes and chromosomes and tinier divisions also struck nerve cells. Any atom might be hit, blazing into fission and decaying into other elements. The process was complicated. The results were not: the nerve was directly stimulated, producing aural and visual hallucinations.

Normally, the hallucination was blanked out. But as the level of body radioactivity increased, so did the strength of the vision. It dominated consciousness. The outside world ceased to have meaning.

The hallucination took only one form, a beautiful woman outside the ship, unclad and beckoning.

It was the image of vanished fertility that appeared once the person was incapable of reproducing *as a human.*

Why this was so hadn't been determined. Psychologists had investigated and learned only that it invariably occurred after too great exposure. There was another thing they learned. No, that had come first. This was the reason they had investigated.

In the Solar System, the greatest single source of radiation, including the hard rays, was the Sun. It was natural that the siren image should seem stronger in that direction, that it should fade or retreat toward its origin. No one had ever returned from compulsive pursuit of the illusionary woman, though in early days ra-

dio contact had been made with ships racing toward the Sun.

The heredity block was self-enforcing.

Deviously, the race protected itself, or something higher watched over it to assure *human* continuity. Marlowe wasn't sure which, but it was there.

"I think you're on the wrong track," he said. "Shield the ship completely and it won't matter how long the trip takes. The crew can work in safety."

Demarest grunted. "Some day we'll have an inertia-free drive and it won't matter how much mass we use. It does now. Our designs are a compromise. Both of us have to work with what's possible, not what we dream of. I'll build my ship; you find the right crew to man it."

Marlowe went back to his graphs. Machines could be changed, but the human body clung stubbornly to the old patterns. He couldn't select his crews any younger—but was there perhaps a racial type more resistant to radiation? Where? No place that he knew of. Maybe the biologists could produce one, he thought hopefully, and knew he was fooling himself. Human beings weren't fruit flies; by the time enough generations rolled around for the resistant strain to breed true—and leave a surplus to man the ships—he would be long dead and the problem solved.

The best of humanity would be dead, too, wiped out by sterilization.

Or the Solar System would be peopled by mutant monstrosities.

FAR away, and not concerned with the problem, Ethan shrugged resignedly. "Guess we'll have to get used to the idea—we just won't see him till he grows up—if we'll still be around."

"You've got years and years ahead of you, and not worth a thing the whole time!" Amantha snapped.

"Damnation," said Ethan wistfully, "I'd like to dandle him."

"Won't be the same when he grows up and comes here," Amantha conceded. "There I go agreein' with you! What's got into me?"

"Maybe we can get on the next slow ship. They run them once in a while for people with weak hearts." He considered. "Don't know whether Retired Citizens' Home will let us go, though."

"Retired Citizens!" She blew her nose scornfully. "They think we don't know it's just a home for the aged!" She threw away the tissue. "Think they'll let us?"

"It won't be them so much that'll stop us. Our hearts ain't too good and we haven't got much space time to use. We

shouldn't have gone to Venus."

"We had to see Edith and Ed and their kids and we had to come back to Mars so we could be near John and Pearl and Ray. Let's not regret what we've done." She picked at the chair arm. "We've been here a long time, ain't we?"

Ethan nodded.

"Maybe they've forgotten we've only got a month left," she said eagerly.

"You sure it's a month?"

"Figure it out. It took longer when we went."

"Then it's no use. A slow ship is all we'd be allowed to take—and we wouldn't be allowed because it'd be more than a month."

"They won't remember every last minute we spent in space."

"They will, too," he stated. "They've got records."

"Maybe they lost them."

"Look, we've got kids and grandchildren here. They come around and see us. Do we have to go to Earth, 'specially when it'd be against the law?"

"That's just it," she argued. "We've seen all our other kids' kids. Ain't we going to see the youngest? How do we know his wife can take care of a baby? I can't sleep nights, thinking of it."

"Try catnaps during the day, like I do."

Amantha touched the button and the automatic chair stopped abruptly. "Are you going to try to get tickets or aren't you?"

"I'll think about it. Go ahead and rock."

"I won't," she said obstinately, "not even if it was the kind of chair you can rock yourself. I thought I married a man who'd make me happy."

"I've always done my best. Go ahead and rock."

"But will you try to get the tickets?"

Ethan nodded resignedly and felt better when the chair began to swing back and forth. There was no living with a woman when she didn't have peace of mind.

AMANTHA lay in bed, listening. Sometimes her hearing was very good, the way it used to be. Other times, it wasn't worth a thing. The way it came and went reminded her of when she was young and used to wonder why old folks couldn't hear. Now she could often lie next to Ethan and not even notice whether he was snoring. Tonight her hearing was good.

Footsteps came from the hall, creaky noises of someone trying not to make a sound. She'd lain awake many nights, hearing him come home. She knew who it was and for once she didn't mind. The Home for Retired Citizens had rules.

Careful, she thought. There's

the bad spot where the floor's thin and bends when you step on it. Then when your foot comes off it, it goes ploinnnnng. They don't build right any more. Skimping and trying to save.

But there wasn't a sound. Ethan avoided it. When she thought of it, she realized he had a suspicious amount of skill—the skill of practice.

Ethan was fumbling at the door and she forgot her irritation. She slipped out of bed and swung the door open. He stumbled in against her. "'Mantha, they laughed—"

"Did you have anything to eat?" she broke in.

"Cup of that Mars coffee. But—"

"Don't talk till you get something hot inside. Empty belly, empty head."

"Can't eat stuff that comes out of the wall. I'll wait till breakfast."

She flicked the light on low and punched the selector. She took the glow-plate from under the bed and set it on the table. As the food arrived, she beated it and began adding spices. "There—it ain't real food, but you can pretend."

Ethan pretended and, when the food was gone, wiped his lips and looked at her.

She nodded. "Now you can tell me—but keep your voice low. Don't wake anyone up."

Ethan stretched and creaked. "Went down to the Interplanet office and they wouldn't talk to me. Said there wasn't any ship leaving for the next ten months and they didn't sell tickets in advance. I kept pestering them and they got mad. They looked up our records and said we couldn't go anytime, except on a fast ship, and, considering our age, it was doubtful they'd let us. Didn't give up, though, and finally they said we might get a release from the man who'd take us. Maybe they wanted to get rid of me. Anyway, they sent me down to talk with one of the pilots."

AMANTHA approved. Go straight to the man responsible. Persistence could get you there.

"He talked real nice for a while," Ethan continued. "He explained he didn't own the ship and didn't have the say-so who he took. I knew you wanted to go real bad. I offered him the money we'd saved."

"*All* of it, Ethan?"

"Don't get mad. Figured it was worth it to you."

"Don't believe in paying extra," she mused, "but did you tell him we could borrow some if it wasn't enough?"

"Didn't get a chance. He started laughing, saying didn't I un-

derstand he got paid not just for each trip, but for all the years after that, when he was finished and had used up his time and couldn't work at the only thing he knew? Saying that he wouldn't risk that kind of security for any money and I was an idiot for believing he might." Ethan trembled.

"Never mind. He's an old fool."

"He's younger than Jimmy."

"Some people get wisdom when they're young."

Ethan sat morosely in the chair. "If Jimmy hadn't made that last trip, he'd be here and he'd have married a girl here and his kids would be here. We wouldn't have to worry about them."

"I guess so, but he was lucky anyway. They found out he wasn't as strong as he was supposed to be and wouldn't let him come back." She began clearing the dishes. "How'd they know he couldn't come back?"

"They got tests. They give them each trip."

She should have thought of it. They had tests. Because of tests, Jimmy was safe but distant. She sat down.

"Tired." Ethan yawned. "Let's go to bed."

"You go. I'm thinking."

Amantha went on thinking while he undressed and lay down. Sometimes it was difficult—things weren't as clear as they used to be. Tonight, though, she had no trouble managing her mind. A woman who had kids had to know her way around things. Presently, she said, "Tomorrow I'm going to bake."

Ethan stirred. "Won't do no good. Didn't say so, but there was a girl talking to the pilot when I got there. She was crying and begging him to take her to Earth next trip. Said she'd do anything if he would."

"Shame on her!" exclaimed Amantha. "But did it work?"

"She was young and pretty and still he wouldn't pay attention to her," said Ethan. "What chance would you have?"

"I'm going to bake tomorrow. In the morning, we're supposed to go for a walk. We'll take a big basket. Do you remember the old canal nobody goes near any more?"

There was no answer. Ethan was asleep. Now that she'd decided what to do, she lay down beside him.

THE sentry huddled in his post. It was insulated and supplied with oxygen, very much like a spacesuit. Though big for a spacesuit, it was a small place to spend hours in without relief. But there were compensations: never anything to do—except as now. He went to the mike.

"Get back," he shouted.

They paid no attention.

Swearing, he shouted again, turning up the volume. Even in the thin air, he had enough sound to blast them off their feet. But they kept on going. He poked the snout of his weapon through the porthole and then withdrew it. Who'd given him those orders anyway? He didn't have to obey them. He clamped on his oxygen helmet and slipped into electric mitts and hurried outside.

"Where do you think you're going?" he demanded, standing in front of them.

"Hello," said Amantha. "Didn't see anyone around."

Damn senior citizens — they never used hearing aids. "You've got to turn around and go back," he said.

"Why?"

He was shivering and didn't see how they could stand it. Thin clothing and obsolete oxygen equipment. Oddly, they could take more than you'd think, though. Used to it, he supposed. "Come on in," he commanded gruffly. He wasn't going to freeze. They followed him into the post. "Didn't you see the signs to keep out?"

"But the ships aren't using the field. What harm are we doing?"

"Orders," he said. There were still a few pilots checking over their ships, making sure everything was in working condition before they were locked up. In a week, all flight personnel would be gone to the settlements, there to await the next round of voyages when Earth came near. They had it soft, while he, the guard, had to stay in cold discomfort.

"We're going to visit a friend of my son," said Amantha. "They were pilots together. Do you object?"

He didn't, but there were some who would. The order made sense with respect to little boys who would otherwise swarm over

the field, falling off ships or getting stuck in rocket tubes.

"What have you got?" he asked, eying Amantha's parcel dubiously.

"I baked something." She opened a corner of the package and the smell drifted out. "Made it with Martian fruit. Not much of it around these days."

He sniffed and became hungry. That was queer—he'd eaten before coming on duty.

"Okay," he said. "You can go. Don't get caught or it's my neck." He stood closer to the old man and woman, and the package, too, and pointed out the window. "Act like you're leaving in case anyone's checking up. When you get near the line of ships, duck behind them and walk along until you find the right one. No one will see you except me."

Amantha pinched the package together. "I'd give you some, but I can't cut it before the pilot sees it."

"I guess you can't," said the sentry wistfully. "Maybe he won't eat all of it."

"May he won't. I'll bring you back what's left—if there *is* any left."

Long after they were gone, the sentry stood there, trying to analyze the indefinable odor. He was still standing there when the checkup squad marched in and arrested him for gross dereliction of duty.

"GO away," said the pilot, disappearing from the viewport. Ethan pounded on the hull with a rock. The pilot came back, twisting his face. "Stop it. I'll angle the rocket tubes around and squirt you with them."

Ethan raised the rock.

"Okay," said the pilot. "I'll talk to you, though I know what you want." Sullenly, he made the hatch swing open. He looked down at them. "All right, let's hear it."

"Got a present for you," said Ethan.

"Not allowed to take bribes unless it's money."

"Young man, where are your manners?" snapped Amantha.

"Haven't got any. It's the first thing they train out of you." The pilot started to jerk his head back, saw the rock and decided not to close the hatch. He glanced at the narrow ladder to the ground. "I'll take your present. Bring it up."

He stopped smirking as Amantha hitched up her skirts and, holding the package in one hand, swung up the ladder. Agile as goats and probably as sensible, he thought. He took hold of her as she neared the top.

"Grandma, you're too old to climb around. You'll break every brittle bone in your body if you fall."

"Ain't so brittle," said Amantha, making way for Ethan who had followed her. "My, it's cold!" She began shivering. "Invite us in to get warm."

"You can't go in. I'm busy. Hey, wait!" The pilot hurried after her into the control compartment.

Amantha was looking around when he arrived. "Cozy but kind of bare," she said. "Why don't you hang up pictures?"

"Most fabulous pictures you'll ever see are right there."

Amantha followed his glance. "Nothing but Mars. I can see that every day." She puzzled over it. "Oh, you're teasing an old woman. I didn't mean what you see out of the port, stars and planets and such. I'd want a picture of an Indian settin' on a horse."

"I'll bet!" muttered the pilot. "Get warm in a hurry. I've got work to do."

"You just go ahead," she said. "We'll set here and toast our toes. We don't aim to interfere."

"I'll stay," said the pilot hastily. "Let's have the present." He'd made a tactical error—he should have ignored the noise that went shimmering through the hull when the old man had pounded with a rock. No, it was nice to think he could have, but impossible. Patience was one of the things the aged did have and the young didn't.

Amantha set the package down. The pilot scrambled ahead of her and got the navigator's instruments off the desk and into the drawer.

She opened and displayed the contents.

"I baked it for you," she said. "It's a cake."

HE could see what it was. "Hate cake," he said. "Can't eat it."

"You'll eat this. Canalberry shortcake."

"Canalberry?" he asked, wrinkling his face. He smelled it and changed expressions in the middle of a wrinkle. Resolutely, he turned away from it and saw Ethan clearly, perhaps for the first time. It was the old man who had tried to bribe him a few days ago. They weren't as innocent as they seemed. What were they trying to do?

"Ain't you even going to taste it?" she urged.

He shuddered suspiciously. It smelled good, though he had told the truth about hating the stuff. Under other circumstances, he might have nibbled at a piece for politeness' sake.

"Can't. Doctor's orders."

"Diabetic? Didn't think they let them in space-service," said Amantha. "Funny, it's the same with Ethan. He can't eat sweets, either." She looked at her creation. "Seems a shame to bring it so far to somebody who can't touch it. Do you mind if I cut myself a slice?"

"Go ahead, Grandma."

"Amantha," she corrected him and brought out a knife and two small plates. He wondered if there was any significance. *Two* plates.

She laid a slice on the plate and poked at it with a fork that

was also in the package. She put the fork down and picked up the cake.

"It don't taste right unless you eat it the way it was meant to be," she said.

He watched her in anguish. His nose quivered and his stomach rumbled. He shouldn't have let them in.

A crumb fell to the floor and Amantha reached for it. She straightened up, a berry in her hand.

"Canalberries," she said. "They're nearly all gone. Used to be you could hardly go anywhere without stepping in them."

She crushed the berry and the rich aroma swept devastatingly through the air.

"Sure you won't have some?" she asked, slicing the cake and placing it in front of him. When he finished that, he cut another, and another, until the cake was gone.

The pilot settled logily in a chair and dozed off. Amantha and Ethan watched him in silence.

The pilot got up and began to stretch lazily without seeming to notice them. The laziness disappeared and the stretch changed into a jerk that seemed to elongate his body. He sprang out of the compartment and went leaping down the corridor. When he came to the hatch, he didn't hesitate. The ladder was too slow. He jumped.

He landed on the sand, sinking in to his knees. He extricated himself and went bounding over the field.

"Never saw canalberries take so long," muttered Amantha. "Don't know what's wrong. Nothing's as good as it used to be."

She shook off her hat and closed the airlock.

"You don't need those nose plugs any more, Ethan. Come on, let's see if you remember."

SEVERAL hours later, she twirled unfamiliar knobs and, by persistence and beginner's luck, managed to get the person she wanted.

"You the commander?" Since he had a harassed look, she assumed he was. "Thought you might be worried about that poor boy."

"Madam, what do you want?" He scowled at the offscreen miscreant who had mistakenly summoned him. "I'm chasing criminals. I haven't got time to chat about old times."

"Don't sass me. I thought you might want to know how to stop that poor boy from running around."

The commander sat down. "What young man?" he asked calculatingly.

"Don't know his name," said

Amantha. "He ran out of the ship before we could ask him."

"So *you're* the poisoner," said the commander coldly. "If he dies, neither your age nor your sex will make any difference."

"Just canalberries," Amantha assured him. "Reckon you wouldn't know about them."

"What are you talking about?"

"Canalberries. Used to be lots of them. Males, men and animals, just can't help eating them. Don't bother women or any other kind of females. Biologists used to tell us it was a seed-scattering device. Guess so. Won't hurt him none. Try bicarb and vinegar. It'll fix him up."

"For your sake, I hope it will!" said the commander. "He's in a bad way." He stabbed a pencil at her and his voice became stern. "If you follow directions, I'm sure I can get you off lightly."

"Think we will?" said Amantha.

The commander hurried on. "It's hard to find a ship in space. Stay where you are or, if you can, turn around and come back—*slowly*. We'll send a ship up and transfer a competent pilot to bring you down. Do you hear?"

"Real plain. You got good radios on these ships."

He smothered a growl. "Your lives are in danger. We're not going to chase out and rescue you unless you cooperate." It was an understatement. If they observed radio silence, search ships would never find them. They might not think of it, but he wouldn't bet. They were smart enough to steal the ship.

There was another thing. From what he'd learned from records, they were close to the exposure limit. Any moment now, they might go berserk, turning their course fatally toward the Sun. He had to be careful what he said.

"We'll get you out of this, but only if you help. I refuse to sacrifice men and waste their flight time, which is more precious than any ship, merely to save two senile incompetents. Is this clear?"

"I suppose," said Amantha. "We've got to go home."

The commander rubbed his hands. They weren't as stubborn as he feared. He'd rescue them.

"Good. I'll have men aloft in a few minutes."

"Guess it was you who didn't hear," she said. "Our home is on Earth."

II

"THERE'S no one here," said the robot blocking the door.

"We'll wait." Amantha tried to go inside. The robot wouldn't move.

It was dark and windy and, from the steps, they could see lights of houses glowing around them. Not many—it was near the edge of the little town. Farther away, over the hill, the ship nestled safely in a valley. No one had seen them land. They were sure of it.

Ethan removed his hat and his bent shoulders straightened. He seemed to grow taller.

"Rain," he said in awe. "Thirty years and yet I haven't forgotten what it's like."

"It's wet, that's what it's like," said Amantha. "Robot, let us in or I'll have Ethan take a wrench to you. He loves to tinker."

"I can't be threatened. My sole concern is the welfare of my charge. Also, I'm too large for any human to hurt me."

"Damnation, I'm soppin'!" complained Ethan. "It's better to remember the rain than to be in it."

"Wait till my son Jimmy gets back. He'll be ravin'. Makin' us stay out here and get soaked."

"Son? Is the Jimmy you refer to Pilot James Huntley?"

"Ex-pilot."

"Correct. But he's not at home. He took his wife to the hospital half an hour ago."

"So soon?" gasped Amantha. "Thought I taught him better than that. Women have got to rest between kids."

"It's not another child," said the robot with disinterest. "It has to do with one of the ills flesh is heir to and machines are not. Nothing serious."

Ethan fidgeted, turning up his collar. Water began flowing from the eaves. "Stop arguin' and let us in. Jimmy will turn off your juice when he finds you've kept his folks outside."

"Folks? He has none here. A mother and father living happily on Mars. They died quite recently, lost in space and plunging into the Sun."

"Make up your mind," Amantha said peevishly. "We ain't on Mars, we weren't happy and we didn't get lost and plunge into the Sun."

"I merely repeat—in sequence—the information I'm given or overhear. If it's inconsistent, so are humans. I'm used to it."

"'Mantha, they think we're dead," said Ethan. He wiped a raindrop away. "Poor Jimmy!"

A thin wail came from a crack in the door. The robot's eyes shone briefly, then dimmed.

"What's that?" asked Amantha. "Sounds like a baby. Thought you said no one was home."

"No responsible adult. Only a child. Because of that, I can admit no one except the parents—or a doctor if I decide one is needed." The robot whirred and

drew itself up. "He's absolutely safe. I'm a Sitta."

"You sure are. Now get out of my way before I jab you. The kid's crying."

"He is, but it's no concern of yours. I'm better acquainted with infant behavior than any human can be. The pathetic sob merely means that the child wants attention. I was given no instructions to hold him."

AGAIN the child cried. "Who needs to be told?" demanded Amantha. "Nobody gives grandmothers instructions."

"He's got a grandfather to cuddle him," added Ethan. "How far do you think we came to do it?"

"And he's not cryin' because he wants attention. Something's stickin' him and he's hungry. Don't you think a grandmother would know?"

"There's nothing that can stick him, but if, by accident, something sharp had gotten in his bed and if he were also hungry, he would sound like this." The Sitta hunched down and swiveled its head, giving an imitation. "You see? I do nothing but watch babies. It's built into me."

Inside the house, the child's tone changed, became querulous, listening. Interrogatively, it offered a single yowl.

"My analysis was correct. It wanted attention. The parents left so hurriedly, they forgot to give me permission. When I didn't come to investigate, the child stop—"

The wail burst forth with renewed vigor.

The robot rotated its head and the alert look flashed on and off. It stuttered, "I know w-what I'm doing. But I—I can tell only what has happened to my charge, n-never what *will!*" The Sitta rumbled bewilderedly. "Anticipation is beyond my capacity. The child *is* hurt and hungry. Please come in and help me."

Triumphantly, Amantha followed the robot into the house toward the nursery. She whispered to Ethan, "Sittas ain't smart. I reckon he never heard a bunch of babies together. If one cries, they all do."

The Sitta barred the path. "You seem sincere and are obviously an expert. But before you go in, understand this—attempt no harm to the being in there. I'm linked."

"You'll be unlinked if you don't stop acting balky," warned Amantha. She ducked under his arm and darted toward the crib.

"By linked, I mean that if anything happens that I require aid to handle, an alarm rings in Sittas Circle and help is on the way. Meanwhile, I can put out fires or carry him unharmed through concrete walls."

"Go ahead, run through a wall," invited Amantha abstractly, snatching up the child. "The darling's wet, too. Fetch me a diaper."

The robot fetched at her command. And when the child was quiet, even cooing, but with a sharp undertone of protest, Amantha settled back. "Now we've got to feed him."

"They didn't give me special instructions and I can't originate. If you hadn't come, I'd bave had to contact a doctor."

Amantha handed the child to Ethan. "You hold him." She went into the kitchen.

Ethan tossed the child up. "Here we go," he bellowed. "Free fall. Got to start early to make a spaceman out of you." The Sitta stared at them, puzzled, as the infant shrieked with fear or joy. "Now if only Jimmy was here to see us," said Ethan, grinning proudly.

Jimmy didn't come back soon enough. The police arrived first.

ETHAN wandered to the window. The ground was far below. He didn't want to think of what was outside the door.

"Don't mind jail myself—been in a few." He looked at Amantha. "Just for raising hell. Never thought I'd be responsible for putting *you* behind bars."

"It wasn't you," said Amantha, her back straighteoing. "Curious about it myself." Wisps of hair straggled over her face. "I mean why didn't we think of it on Mars? Didn't we know what they'd do?"

"I guess we didn't." Ethan cracked his knuckles contemplatively. "Did it occur to you?"

"No. I can't understand." She frowned, but it didn't help clarify what she was thinking about.

"We're criminals," said Ethan soberly. "Thieves."

"I don't mind for us. Jail's not much worse than the home for Retired Citizens. It's our grandson I'm thinking of."

"Don't worry. They won't do a thing to him." His eyes widened and he wiped off the sweat. "Oh. I see what you mean."

"Jailbirds," said Amantha. "We'll still be in here when he grows up. It's a fine way to help your kin. They'll never trust him with us in his family."

"Jailbirds," repeated Ethan mournfully. By some magic, his face cracked along the wrinkles and broke into a smile. "But once we flew," he whispered to himself.

The door opened and an official of some sort came in. Outside, Ethan caught a brief glimpse of guards.

Marlowe, chief training director of space pilots for Interplanet Transport, Inc., walked in

silence across the room and eased tiredly into a chair behind the desk. He'd gotten the news late at night, having been the first one contacted. The ship that had been lost had showed up in the atmosphere. There couldn't be a mistake. No other flight was scheduled for months.

"Follow it," he had ordered and the trackers had kept it on the screen, flashing a message to the police as soon as they located where it landed. It was logical that it should go where it did, but he didn't think that anything about this flight was susceptible to a rational approach.

Marlowe's eyelids felt lined with sand, but that was as nothing compared to his mental irritation. The two oldsters were dead and the ship was vaporized in the Sun. But, of course, it wasn't true and he had to figure out why.

Others would be here to help him unravel the mystery, from Demarest on down. Meanwhile, he was first. There was a lesson to learn if he could figure out what it was. Damn these senile incompetents.

"Ethan and Amantha Huntley?" he asked. They didn't fit in with his preconceived picture.

"You the judge?" said Ethan. "I demand to see a lawyer. We've got our rights."

"Why don't you let our son

in?" Amantha protested. "I know he's been dying to see us. You can't keep us locked up like this."

"Please! I've just come from a consultation with your son. You'll see him soon. As for being detained, you've been well treated. Most of the time, doctors have been examining you. Isn't that true?"

"What's that got to do with it?" challenged Ethan. "Never been sick a day in my life. Sure, my back hurts, and now and then my knees swell up. But it's nothing. We didn't ask for a doctor. Got our own on Mars. Young fellow, fifty or sixty."

FACTS contradicted each other. They were what Marlowe expected and yet they weren't. It was hard to determine. Records showed that if the old couple were not actually senile incompetents, they were close to it. Now that they'd returned the ship in good condition, legal action against them would be dangerous. Everyone had grandparents and knew that they were sometimes foolish. It was a spot to get out of as gracefully as the company could.

It was as training director for Interplanet Transport, however, that he was interested in them.

"You were in space for nearly four months," he said. "Few people take that much exposure to radiation at one time. We had to determine the state of your health. The evaluation isn't complete, but I think we can say you're in no immediate danger."

Did they understand? It was doubtful. No one else would have stolen the ship and attempted to bring it to Earth. But, damn it, they had done so, landing the ship on the outskirts of the little town, unobserved in the gathering storm.

The facts were painfully fresh in his mind.

"I'd like to know something of your background," said Marlowe. "What's your experience with spaceships?"

"Went to Venus in one," Ethan answered. "Also took a trip to Mars. Stayed there."

The old man had haunted the control compartment, watching how it was done. Some people did. But that was not a substitute for experience.

"That was long ago and you were a passenger. Anything more recent?"

"Nope. Except for this last trip."

That was what didn't make sense.

"Are you sure? Be honest. Check your memory."

The old man had once piloted jets. But it was not the same.

"No other experience," said Ethan. "Had training, though."

Marlowe knew it. Without training, no one could manage takeoff and landing. Somehow, the official search had failed to uncover this vital information. "Where did you take it?"

"Forget the name. Remember every word of it, though."

Marlowe nodded. It was often the case. Early memories were fresh and clear while later events blew over the enfeebled mind and left no trace. "But you didn't tell me where."

"Don't remember that part of it. It was a mighty good course. Wasn't accepted, even though I passed, after paying for my lessons in advance. They said I was too old."

Air lodged in his throat—Marlowe doubled over. If he'd heard rightly . . . Good God, there were angels and correspondence courses that watched over the aged! No—give the credit to angels.

"I realized I wasn't as spry as I used to be," continued Ethan seriously. "Can't shoot off a planet or slam down on one the way your pilots do. We were at the far end of the field, quite a ways off. Everybody was busy with the pilot who was running around. They were trying to help him.

"Guess they didn't see us. They'd have laughed if they did. We went up slow, kind of wobbly. But we got off."

THE old man was beaming, proud of it. He didn't know it wasn't skill but the built-in safety factor, all the stabilizing mechanisms coming into play at once. Demarest, the chief of construction, had seen to it that the ships were well designed. Marlowe would have to commend him when he got here.

A thought occurred to the training director. If the stabilizing mechanisms were there, why not use them always? Of course, it wasn't that simple. Interplanetary ship stabilizers weren't effective at high speed.

Another thought crowded in. Why such high speed? That was something over which there was no choice. The protective atmosphere had to be left swiftly. The speed was added to at every opportunity. It was possible to slow down only at the last moment. Otherwise . . .

Otherwise what?

There was no escape from the conclusion — otherwise heredity was altered and mutations would result. Marlowe sat back. This was true without exception. It was the biggest factor that controlled the conditions of interplanetary flight. But—

They'd had their children!

Marlowe's pulse increased. As training director, he'd learned not to leap at things that merely looked good. He had to examine

them carefully. But—well, it was a new approach, though he couldn't really expect anything from it. There was more to a crew than a pilot, more to space flight than one incredible lucky voyage, for angels took vacations, too.

"You weren't on duty at all times," Marlowe pointed out. "Then there's navigation."

"Don't sleep much," said Ethan. "Catnap once in a while." He thought it over. "When I did sleep, 'Mantha helped out." He looked at her. "I'm not the expert on navigation. You'd better ask her."

"*No!*" cried Marlowe.

"Why not? Just because I'm a woman?" Her eyes were bright.

"But who taught you navigation?"

Amantha sniffed. "Look here, young man, don't tell me what I can learn." She closed her eyes and imagination carried her back to the ship. "Lots of dials and gadgets—but I used to have near as many in my kitchen before they said I was too old to cook. Anyway, you don't have to figure it out on paper. If you look at things just right, you sort of know where you are."

AMANTHA folded her hands. "First, you take a big handful of the Sun's attraction and mix it with a bigger scoop of the gravitation of the planet you happen to be on. For us, that was Mars. Then you add a pinch of acceleration. That's what makes you rise. When you get out a ways, you decrease Mars and add more Earth and another pinch of Sun, stirring it around in your mind each day until it feels just right."

She smiled. "I never did hold with too much measuring."

The muscles in Marlowe's chest felt cramped from holding his breath in. While she spoke, he could almost believe she knew what she was doing, that she had a knack for it. Perhaps she did—brief flashes of clarity swept over her senile, beclouded mind. And the same with the old man. These instances of sanity—and luck—had pulled them through.

The ship was back, unharmed. He shouldn't ask for more. And yet—they had made it to Earth.

The chute in the desk clattered noisily and ejected a packet. Marlowe looked at it—it was for him. The full medical report; it had been slow in coming. But this was a small town. The doctor who had looked them over was good, though. Marlowe made certain of that.

He opened the report and read. When he finished, he knew that though luck and angels had been with them on takeoff and part of the passage—along with

dimly remembered fragments of unrelated skills that had somehow coalesced into a working knowledge of how to run a ship—it wasn't the whole story. When they landed on Earth, it was no miracle. They had known what they were doing.

"What is it?" asked Ethan. "Habeas corpus?"

"No," said Marlowe. But in one sense it was, though of a kind that no mere judge could return a verdict on. He read the report again.

"No evidence of mental senility," it said in part. "Micro-samples of brain cells seem to be taken from someone about forty or fifty. Physical reactions are slow but firm and consistent. There are puzzling aspects. Certain obscure functions apparently are those of septegenarians. Others are in keeping with the mental age. The weakest organs govern, of course; they should live another thirty years, as if they really were in their seventies. However, locomotion and judgment should not be impaired until the very end. Query: Are you sure these are the people I was supposd to examine? I couldn't find that deep, inoperable, though non-malignant tumor the man was supposed to have."

Marlowe folded and refolded the report. Radiation could kill. But it could also cure. It was a standard treatment. But never so drastic and not on the aged for this purpose. He had come at once on two monumental discoveries, both by accident. How many discoveries were accidental?

These two wouldn't live longer, but they would have a better life and in full possession of their senses.

"Sure, we borrowed—stole the ship," said Ethan abruptly, interrupting Marlowe's thoughts. "You got it back, but that don't change things. We've got money. We might have enough to pay for most of the fuel."

"It's not necessary. We'll charge it off as an experiment." Marlowe tried to frown. Perhaps he succeeded. "In return for not prosecuting, I want you to abandon your pension and go to work for Interplanet Transport."

Ethan's joints creaked as he sat up eagerly. "Work it off? Sounds fair." There were wrinkles on his face and there never would be any less, but they weren't as deep as they had been, not when they formed the network of a smile. "I can sweep out a ship. Maybe you'd even let me go on a trip once in a while. I could be a cabin boy."

They had been considered useless and incapable for so long that they still didn't realize what he was saying. They weren't

childish, but they thought they were. Re-education would have to proceed slowly.

"I had a trip in mind for you," said Marlowe. "And Amantha will have to go to work, too."

"Young man, it's been a long time since I cooked anything but one canalberry shortcake, but you just watch what I can stir up."

"I've got just the place for you," Marlowe answered. "One more stipulation — don't talk about your experiences. If reporters come around, and I think they will, say merely that we traced the ship and, after conferring with you, decided to drop all charges. Understand?"

Amantha nodded. "Look bad for you, wouldn't it? Not guarding the ships any better than that, I mean."

He was thankful their minds had merely been resharpened, that they would never regain their original edge. She was right—it *would* look bad. Also, the company had competitors. And by the time *they* got wind of it, he wanted to have a head-start. Only a few of the aged would fit in with his plans, though the rest would benefit, and by more than a change of status.

Marlowe nodded. "That's it. Report tomorrow and we'll go over your assignments."

"Guess you don't know what we're like," said Ethan. "We've hardly seen our littlest grandson yet. What do you suppose we stole—experimented with the ship for?"

Marlowe watched them go and, as the door closed, began to write hurriedly. The others would be here soon. He wanted to have it summarized by the time they arrived.

Half an hour later, he looked at what he'd put down. It was on the back of the medical report.

"Memo: Change the design of our lastest ship. Instead of a heavy-hulled, superfast rocket, requiring the utmost in bodily coordination and stamina, reverse every specification. Permeability to radiation no objection."

He chuckled. Demarest would threaten to resign. It violated every precept he had ever learned. But the engineer would change his mind when he saw the rest of it.

MARLOWE read on: "Top speed need not be high. Emphasis should be placed on safety. Must be maneuverable by operators whose reactive time is not fast, but whose judgment and foresight are trustworthy. Stress simplicity.

"Memo No. 2: Inaugurate another class of service. In addition to fast speedy passages when planets are close, a freight system

that can operate continuously is now possible. The planets will open up faster if a steady supply route can be maintained. Older passengers will be a mainstay, especially since therapeutic value is sure to be disclosed. Estimated time to prepare for first run—one year minimum.

"Memo No. 3: Recruiting. Do not overlook the most unlikely skill. It may indicate undisclosed ability of high order.

"Training: Blank. Improvise as you go along!"

Marlowe got up. He thought he heard planes overhead. If so, he had something for them. He'd have to argue, but he felt up to it. The sand had disappeared from his eyes. His step was lighter, too.

And that was because of another item he hadn't written down. He wouldn't forget.

He was in the mid-forties and would have to begin learning. It was the awkward age—too old—too young. He couldn't hope to pilot the murderously fast ships currently in use. And he couldn't take his place in the clumsy tubs that would soon be swinging between the planets, opening up space to commerce. He would have to wait, but what he learned now would be useful some day. It would be better integrated for having been long buried in his memory.

A vintage aspiration.

When he was immune to the mutating effects of radiation, old and nearly sleepless, he could retire from this career—into a better one.

—F. L. WALLACE

INVASION REPORT

By THEODORE R. COGSWELL

Earth's only defense against the aliens was a weaponless ship and a grim little crew —very grim and very little!

Illustrated by BECK

COLONEL William Faust of the Solar Guard had no business being where he was at the moment.

He took his wide leather belt in another notch and eyed himself critically. First, gleaming space boots, then flaring breeches of midnight black and finally, a soft, snug-fitting, high-collared tunic with the insignia of the Guard which was a crimson lightning flash running diagonally across the front.

On Vega III, the light cruiser Andros *of the Imperial Legion hurtled up through the thin atmosphere . . .*

The Colonel's hands caressed the smooth butts of the snub-

nosed weapons that hung at each hip and then slid away to hang carelessly at his sides. He turned his back to the hatch that led into the control room of the *Glorious,* took two casual steps and then, without warning, spun around as his hands went streaking for his guns. A split-second later, he stood catlike, poised on the balls of his feet, both guns trained steadily on the glaring image of himself that was reflected in the mirror surface of the port.

On Vega III, the light cruiser Andros of the Imperial Legion hurtled up through the thin atmosphere on a mission of interstellar conquest . . .

"Faster than ever," said the warlike figure with stern satisfaction and then, holstering his weapons and adjusting his dress helmet to a jaunty angle, he threw open the hatch that led into the control room of the *Glorious* and entered with a measured military stride.

Somebody barked "Attention!" and ten sets of heels clicked together. Captain Shirey stepped forward and saluted. "All present and accounted for, sir."

THE owners of the ten sets of heels had no more business being where they were than did their Colonel. The starship *Glorious* had GOVERNMENT PROPERTY—KEEP OUT painted in foot-high letters on one side of her main entrance port and TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED on the other —warnings that had been blithely ignored by the guard when the headlights of the battered old flyer that had brought them out blinked out the three shorts and three longs that activated the landing lock.

For a few years after her return from Alpha Centauri, a small maintenance crew had been kept on the *Glorious.* But, as existence became more and more peaceful and settled and Man slowly adjusted to the idea that there was no longer any place to go, these were withdrawn until, finally, the last watchman was removed as being an unnecessary charge against the public funds.

There was talk, for a while, of mounting a warper on her and turning her into a museum, but nobody was really interested except the youngsters—and youngsters don't have votes—so it was finally decided to leave her circling in her lonely orbit as a perpetual monument to the men who had taken her out for the first and last time.

"*At ease!*" As his command relaxed, Colonel Faust stepped out of role.

"Look here, gang," he said, "we've worked through those old operational manuals of my grand-

father's until we know them backward. I figure it's about time we put some of what we know to work. What would you think of the idea of turning on the big vision screen?"

Captain Shirey looked at him dubiously. "To run the scanners, you've got to have power—and that means turning on the main pile."

"So what, Wimpy? All we have to do is just like the manuals say. We've done it a dozen times in dry runs."

The other still looked doubtful. "If you make a mistake when you're just pretending, nothing blows up. And anyway, just being up here would get us in enough trouble, if anybody caught us. If we start turning things on and maybe break something, then we'd really catch it. Why can't we just keep on pretending the same way we have been?"

"Because," said his commander patiently, "you can only learn so much by pretending—and we've learned all we can that way. We've got to get some practice done on the real thing if we're going to be ready when the invaders come. There won't be any pretending then, not when you got to stand back and watch your own sister being dragged off to be a slave. You just think about that for a while."

WIMPY dutifully began to think about it but, somehow, the only reaction he could get to the idea of his sister being stolen was one of relief rather than regret. "They take old Emily, they'll be sorry," he said finally.

Bill started to nod agreement, then caught himself. "Look," he said, "four times now we've sneaked out my father's old flyer while he was out of town and slipped up here—and all we've done is pretend. We got to start really running things if we're going to get trained right. The invaders come in and who else is going to stop them? Those pooping little police boats with a ten-mile ceiling and maybe one medium paralyzer on them?"

Wimpy still looked doubtful.

"You let me do the worrying," said Bill. "I got more right to be here than most people."

Halfway between Earth and Venus there was a sudden shimmer as the Vegan ship slipped out of warp into normal space. It hung motionless for a minute as the alien commander checked his instruments and his armament.

Looking at it one way, William Faust did have more right than most to be on board the *Glorious*. In his room at home, under his bed, was his great-grandfather's space-chest. In it lay the worn

diary that recorded the first high hopes when the *Glorious* took off, then the boredom, then the bitterness and disillusionment that came when Alpha Centauri was found to be a barren and lifeless system.

Bill Faust knew it almost by heart, that chronicle of the young man who went out on the first—and last—starship ever to be constructed, of the middle-aged man who arrived, of the old man who returned to find space-flight a thing of the past and the reports of the expedition that had consumed his life used as final proof of the DeWitt hypothesis that there could be no life on other systems.

There had been a time when those whose dreams were strong enough to stand the shock of crossing over into what adults called "the real world" had some place to go, once they reached the other side. For these, being young was a time of waiting and training for the day when new strength could be tested against whatever lay beyond the safe frontiers. First, seas and continents, then the upper air and the pushing of limits toward the Moon, the planets, until, these once conquered, young eyes turned toward the beckoning beacons of the distant stars themselves.

There had been such a time, but it existed no longer. With the coming of the warpers—those strange contraptions that could so twist the fabric of space that Man and his materials could instantaneously be moved from any place where there was a transmitter to any other where there was a receiver—Mars and Venus were nearer than the corner drugstore. Once they had been set up, space-flight died. There was no point in spending months traveling from one planet to another, when one could do it in a fraction of a second, merely by stepping in one door and out the other.

THE one star that could be reached had been reached. The *Glorious* had returned to slam shut the last gateway to adventure. As for the other stars, they were distant lonely things that hung so far out of reach, only astronomers any longer viewed them with more than casual interest. The great mathematicians and physicists had proved so conclusively that a faster-than-light drive was impossible, nobody bothered to check their figures any longer.

Life was snug and easy and pleasant—and, above all, sensible. Only the youngsters still dreamed of danger and the search for strange things in far places. And, since the best of the psy-

chologists said that a temporary sojourn into a world of make-believe was important to the growing process, the young ones were permitted to assume such strange warlike disguises as were necessary to take them into imaginary worlds of high adventure—providing, of course, that they weren't too noisy about it and emerged in time for supper with clean hands and clean faces . . .

"Check pile controls!" As usual, Colonel Faust had won his point.

"All on full safety, sir," said Second Lieutenant Randolph with a most unmilitary quaver in his voice. He was the most junior of the junior officers, a precocious nine-year-old who was four or five years younger than the rest of the Guardsmen and he had an unfortunate habit of bursting into tears during moments of stress. He was already sniffling slightly, when Bill came over to check the control positions against the diagram he'd memorized.

With a curt nod of approval, Colonel Faust went over to his position at the coordination board and grasped the red handle of the master pile control.

"Power on!"

He pulled back slowly until the lever clicked into the normal operation slot. In the pile room of the *Glorious*, control rods slid smoothly back until they were checked by the safety catches. There was a faint hum of transformers as the long-neglected ship warmed to life.

"Battle screen on!"

A Guardsman frowned in concentration and slowly began to throw the switches that linked the great screen with the scanners set in the outer hull. There was a flicker and then a few tiny white spots blinked on to show meteors large enough to be detected. But, aside from these, there was nothing to show that the screen had been powered.

Colonel Faust gave a grunt of satisfaction, rose to his feet and faced his Guardsmen.

"Your attention, gentlemen," he said in a tone of command.

TEN grim-faced Guardsmen leaned forward expectantly as he pointed dramatically to the empty screen.

"As you can see, the Plutonian fleet is approaching in a cone formation with their heaviest ships at the tip. These are carrying a deadly new weapon, the Q-ray. Our mission is to break through the cone and destroy the flagship, from which the Warlord of Pluto is personally directing the operations of his fleet. Earth expects every man to do his duty." He paused and then barked, "*Engage!*"

THE Guardsmen hunched at their positions as their imaginations suddenly populated the empty screen with a hurtling cone of enemy ships.

Many were the fierce encounters in the next few hours, and close were the brushes with death. When the *Glorious* tore through the outer cone of Plutonian ships and came within range of the shimmering web of Q-rays, the Guardsmen reacted to the fiery touch in quite different fashions. Their Colonel had invented the new weapon on the spur of the moment and there had been no chance for agreement as to just what its effects would be.

Bill remained seated at the coordination board, his face set in a mask of heroic and Promethian suffering. Wimpy, on the other hand, went threshing around on the control room floor, howling that his skin was coming off and that his bones were turning to limp and rubbery things. The rest of the Guards were so impressed by his performance that it wasn't long before the whole contingent, Bill included, were writhing on the floor like wounded snakes.

"The Warlord is making a run for it!" Colonel Faust's voice rang through the general hubbub. "We've got to intercept him. *Stations!*"

Deaf to all but the call of duty, the dying Guardsmen summoned up strength from some hidden reserve and crawled painfully back to their posts on the supposedly rotting stumps of what once had been arms and legs. Colonel Faust fought for five minutes before he was able to reach the master controls. A wavering cheer went up as they once more began to creep up on the ship of the tyrant. He fought back desperately, his great guns hammering shot after shot into the *Glorious*, but still the gallant ship drove on, her mighty drive tubes incandescent under the overload.

"Prepare to ram!"

As the *Glorious* went into her final dive, the game was suddenly terminated by a harsh clangor from the proximity alarm and a red dot jumped into being in the upper left corner of the vision screen. As it crawled toward the center, alarm after alarm went off until the control room was filled with a clanging din.

"Shut those things off!" yelled Bill. Jimmie Ozaki, the Guardsman at the detection station, kicked over a series of switches and the noise suddenly stopped.

"What is it?"

Jimmie stared at the instruments in front of him, as if he'd never seen them before. "If I'm reading these things right, whatever it is would be about fifteen thousand miles out and coming in fast, I'd say. It just popped up

out of no place. So I guess I'm not reading these things right."

Bill went over and made a quick check. "You are."

"Couldn't be a meteor, could it?" asked Wimpy.

Bill shook his head. "If it was, it would show up as a white dot. Red indicates radiation of some sort. The only thing I can figure out is that somebody is out there in a flyer."

"Ain't no flyer can travel that fast," objected Ozaki. "And how come it popped up like it did? Even if it were coasting along with its drive off, its mass would still have registered on the detectors."

Bill stared up at the screen uneasily. "Could be that the scanners are out of kilter somehow. You keep checking, Jimmie."

FIVE minutes later, it was reported as being only a hundred miles away and slowing rapidly. And then Jimmie Ozaki let out a sudden yell. "It's hitting us with some sort of a bigh frequency beam. Looks as if it might be in the communication band."

"Try and tune it in, but don't answer."

The Guardsman at the communication station leaned over his controls. A moment later a speaker came to life. A hissing stream of sibilants came from it, sounds like nothing that had ever been produced by human vocal apparatus. The message was repeated twice and then the speaker went silent. So did the Guardsmen.

Bill was the first to speak. There was a nervous smile on his face when be did. "It must be a police boat," he said in a strained voice. "They must of spotted us sneaking up here and they're trying to throw a scare into us. We're in for it, now."

"That's no police boat, and you know it," whispered Wimpy. "The flyers they got couldn't go out that far, even if they wanted to."

"It's moving in again."

Bill swung quickly to the detection station. "Can you pick that up on visual?"

"I'll try."

The detection screen blanked out for a minute, then lit up again to show a silver speck hanging in darkness.

"Crank her up!"

As power was thrown into the magnifiers, the strange ship swelled in size until it filled half the screen, a gleaming sphere that was like nothing that was recognizable.

"Still think that's a police boat?" said Wimpy in a strained voice.

Bill didn't answer. He watched in horrified fascination as the

strange ship hurtled toward the *Glorious*. It looked as if it were on a collision course, but it suddenly began to decelerate and then, finally, curved into a path that put it in orbit around the *Glorious*.

"How close now?"

Ozaki, at the detection station, had trouble getting his eyes off the screen long enough to read his instruments.

"Less than a mile," he said finally.

"What now?" squeaked somebody.

Nobody had an immediate answer. The Guardsmen looked at each otber and then at the suddenly strange control room, where everything now seemed to be constructed on a scale several sizes too large for them. It was a place for men, not for boys. They all turned to Bill and waited for bim to say something.

For a moment, he couldn't. He was being pulled in two directions at once. Panic tugged at him, panic that threatened momentarily to seize control of his legs and send bim bolting to the safety of the old flyer that sat in the landing lock. Against this urge to flee was the dawning realization that they were no longer playing a game which could be discontinued at will. It was like a nightmare where one has suddenly lost the saving knowledge that he can always wake up if things get too bad.

TO run or to stand, to retreat from grim reality or to face it —the decision had to be made. Bill was standing on the line that separates the child from the man and he had to move one way or the other. He looked at the menacing shape on the screen, then at the frightened faces of the other boys who were waiting for him to take the lead.

He dropped his eyes and it seemed as if the deck plates beneath his feet had turned to glass, so that he could see the smug, defenseless world that stretched out below. A tidy, rational world that had long ago given up such childish things as arms and armies—and spaceships. When he finally spoke, his voice was so low they could hardly hear bim.

"We've got to stay," he said.

When the words penetrated, there was a shuffling of feet and a muttering of disagreement. "We shouldn't have come out here in the first place!" said Wimpy.

Second Lieutenant Randolph began to sniffle. "I want to go home," he announced. "Right now!"

"Me too," said Ozaki, "and I'm going. Let's get out of here before it's too late." He started to sidle toward the door. The

rest wavered, then began to follow him.

Bill hesitated only a moment, then dashed across the control room and slammed the door shut. "*Wait!*" he shouted, throwing himself in front of it. "It's already too late. You can't get away now."

Captain Shirey forgot about military courtesy and cocked one hard fist under his superior's nose. "You get out of the way or you're going to get a bust on the snoot!"

"You've *got* to listen to me," said Bill frantically. "That thing's only a mile away from us and we're three hundred miles out from Earth. You saw how fast it can go. If it's looking for trouble, do you think it's just going to sit by and let us pull away in that old flyer?"

Wimpy started to answer and then stopped. He let his fist drop slowly to his side. "Maybe you're right," he said slowly. "But if we don't run, then what?"

"Just sit for a while and see what happens. From the way that ship's acting, they must figure the *Glorious* has been abandoned. They'd never have come this close, if they didn't. If they're just snooping around and don't catch on that anybody's in here, maybe they'll just go away."

There were wistful glances toward the door, but after a moment, the whole contingent straggled back to their positions.

As they watched the alien ship, a square hatch opened in its gleaming spherical hull. There was a suggestion of movement and then a long, torpedo-shaped object slowly emerged and floated free alongside the ship. There was something seated on it—something that wasn't human! It wore a wheel-shaped spacesuit with a hemispherical vision dome bulging out from the center.

THERE was a little spurt of flame from the rear of the torpedo and then it sped away from the alien ship, twisting and looping about. The thing riding on it moved busily for a moment, adjusting the controls. Then he brought it to a halt with its nose pointing toward the *Glorious*.

"What do you think they're figuring on doing with that?" asked Wimpy in a shaky voice.

"Using it on us."

"What for?"

"How many other spaceships does Earth have? Once the *Glorious* is knocked out, there's nothing left that can be used against them."

"But this thing can't fight," protested Wimpy. "And there's nobody left that knows how to run her."

"She could fight once," said Bill grimly. "Maybe she still can.

And there is somebody left to run her—*us!*" He turned his back to the screen and snapped, "*Stations!*" The Guard slowly took on a semblance of order.

"All positions on. And I mean really on! We aren't playing any longer. I want an immediate report on the condition of this tub."

There was hesitation for a moment, then a sudden flurry of action at each position as switches were thrown and instruments read. When they came, the reports weren't very encouraging.

"All drives disconnected."

The *Glorious* couldn't run away.

"No missiles in the racks."

"No shells in the lockers."

The *Glorious* couldn't fight.

"There's got to be *something*," said Bill as he went over to the gunnery station. The Guardsman at the controls looked up unhappily and pointed to the long row of little red plates that registered the number of rounds available for each gun. Each was blinking out the word EMPTY. "Turrets and automatic trackers are still operatiooal, but that doesn't help any."

Bill stood thinking a minute. "Maybe it can," he said finally and went back to the coordination board. "Look, gang," he said. "What we know and what they know are two different things. They've no way of knowing that those guns aren't loaded. Maybe we can pull a bluff."

"And if we can't?" said somebody.

He shrugged. "Somebody got a better idea? We can't just sit here and let them blow up the ship."

WIMPY let out a sudden shout and pointed toward the screen. Bill spun around and saw the alien was leaving the torpedo and returning to his ship. He felt a sudden dryness in his throat.

"This is it!" he yelled. "All guns on target!"

There was a growl of powerful motors as the turrets, set in blisters along the top and sides of the *Glorious*, swung swiftly to zero-in their long-muzzled guns on the alien ship. There was no reaction for a moment, and then a loog burst of sound came from the wall speakers.

"Do you want to answer that?"

Bill shook his head. "Better if we don't talk. Maybe they've got some sort of a translator over there. If I start shooting off my mouth, I might say the wrong thing."

"*Bill!*" There was a shout from the detection station.

"Yeah?" He didn't look away from the screen. The torpedo still hung motionless, its nose pointed toward the *Glorious*.

"I think they're trying to make visual contact."

"See if you can pick them up." Bill ordered.

There was a flickering in the reproduction cube of the tri-V receiver and, slowly, a distorted replica of the control room of the alien ship began to materialize. Then, as the Guardsman at the communication station struggled with his controls, the scene cleared.

There were seven of them. They weren't humanoid — they looked like huge furry footballs —but they weren't the slavering monstrosities that Bill and the rest had half expected.

"Turn on our transmitter."

After a brief warm-up period, there was a bouncing of aliens and their own screen lit up. Bill stepped forward and, as sternly as he could, made a stabbing motion toward Earth with a bent forefinger. There was a small commotion while all the fur balls rolled together to form a huddle. Then one of them went bouncing over to a set of controls at the far end of their control room.

"The bluff didn't work," gasped Wimpy. "They're going to blast us with that torp!"

"Not yet," said Bill. "Gunnery!"

"Yes?"

"Automatic trackers on!"

The Guardsman at the gunnery station looked puzzled, but he didn't ask any questions. His hands slid forward and the parabolic mirrors that projected the UHF beams—that had once controlled the guided missiles carried by the *Glorious* — swung until they were centered on the silver sphere.

"Carriers on!"

"Check."

THERE was a sudden flurry of movement in the alien control rooms as their detectors gave warning of the beams that were striking their hull. Bill faced the tri-V scanner and held up his hand for attention. There was some more scuttling and then all the aliens faced toward their own screen. Bill withdrew one of the odd-shaped weapons that hung at his hip and held it up so they could see it.

"Get over here, Wimpy."

"What for?"

"Hurry up. And play it straight."

The freckle-faced second in command marched over with a military stride and saluted.

"Q-ray," said Bill. "Get it?"

Wimpy started to protest and then caught himself. "Sounds crazy to me," he muttered, "but you're the boss."

Bill's side-arm was a complicated affair with two short barrels, one capped with a green lens and the other with a red. He held the weapon out to call attention

to it and then raised it and pressed a stud on the stock three times. Three bursts of red light flared out briefly.

"Give them three quick flips on the missile beams."

The Guardsman hit the cut-off button one, two, three.

Bill's gun flashed red three more times.

"Once more should give them the idea."

Again the carrier beams were clicked on and off.

"Make this good." Bill pointed the weapon deliberately at Wimpy and pressed the stud. Captain Shirey stood at attention, a circle of red light glowing on his chest.

"Now!" There was a sudden green flash as Bill jerked the other trigger.

Immediately Wimpy let out a bloodcurdling yell and then, clawing at his chest, collapsed in a writhing heap on the floor. Bill turned back to the scanner and pointed to his gun again.

"Three more." By the time the barrier beams had struck the other ship twice, chaos had let loose in its control room.

"What's happening?"

It was hard to tell. They were lined up in a row, their pink underbodies tilted toward the ceiling, and weak little leglike organs waving wildly.

"I think," said Colonel Faust slowly, "that they're standing on their heads."

But surrender was not negotiated without some difficulty. The alien who seemed to be the commander kept bouncing in and out of one of a pair of metallic cups that projected from a complex mechanism at one side of the control room. Bill finally got the idea.

"I think they've got some sort of a mechanical translator and they want me to come over."

There was a protest from the floor. "You can't go there!"

"Shut up!" said Bill. "You're supposed to be dead. Do you want to give the whole show away?" Wimpy subsided obediently. "I've got to go over. We can't escort them down and, once they find out that we aren't following, there's nothing to keep them from making a run for it. I'll take the flyer over. There's a three-quarter-size pressure suit in the luggage compartment that I think I can get into. Keep me covered."

"With what?" softly mumbled Wimpy.

LATER, with one exception, the Solar Guard stood at attention as a small red dot crawled toward one corner of the detection screen.

"Can I get up now?" said a plaintive voice.

Colonel Bill Faust looked down

at the sprawled form of his second in command and then suddenly doubled up and began to emit strangled sounds that were half sobs and half laughter. He finally recovered enough to reach down and pull Wimpy to his feet.

"You were real good, Wimpy. Real good!" He went off into another hysterical paroxysm.

Wimpy grabbed him by the shoulders and shook him. "*Stop* it! Why did you let them go?"

"They—they . . ." Bill choked, gasped and then tried again. "They couldn't stay any longer. They had to get home for supper."

"They *what?*" gasped Wimpy.

"They had to get home for supper." Bill pointed at the screen. "And there they go."

FASTER, the red dot went, and faster still and then it flicked out of sight.

"I'll bet that's the last time they come snooping around the Reservation," said Bill with a mysterious grin.

"The what?"

"The Reservation. That's this whole star cluster."

Wimpy advanced purposefully and waved a fist threateningly. "Are you going to tell us what happened or do we have to beat it out of you?"

Bill worked hard to control himself. "Suppose," he said at

last, "that, aside from a few dead systems like Alpha Centauri, the Universe was full of life—and some of the races have had interstellar drives for so long that even the kids' flyers are equipped with them." He looked around at the boys.

"Go ahead," said Wimpy impatiently.

"Don't you get it?"

They all stared at him blankly.

"Well," he continued, "suppose a bunch of kids were out one day and they went poking around where they had no business being and they found a big old ship that looked deserted."

"The *Glorious!*"

"So, whenever they could get away, they'd sneak over and play invasion."

"Oh, no!" said Wimpy.

"And then, one day, they decided to run a real all-out offensive, and one of the kids borrowed his father's ship without bothering to ask permission. And right in the middle of the game, the turrets on the ship they thought was deserted suddenly swing around and they find a couple of dozen space-rifles pointed directly at them. They want to run away, but they're too scared, and to make matters worse, they get a demonstration of a horrible strange weapon. And we thought *we* were scared!"

There was silence in the control room for a moment as the Guardsmen tried to digest what had happened.

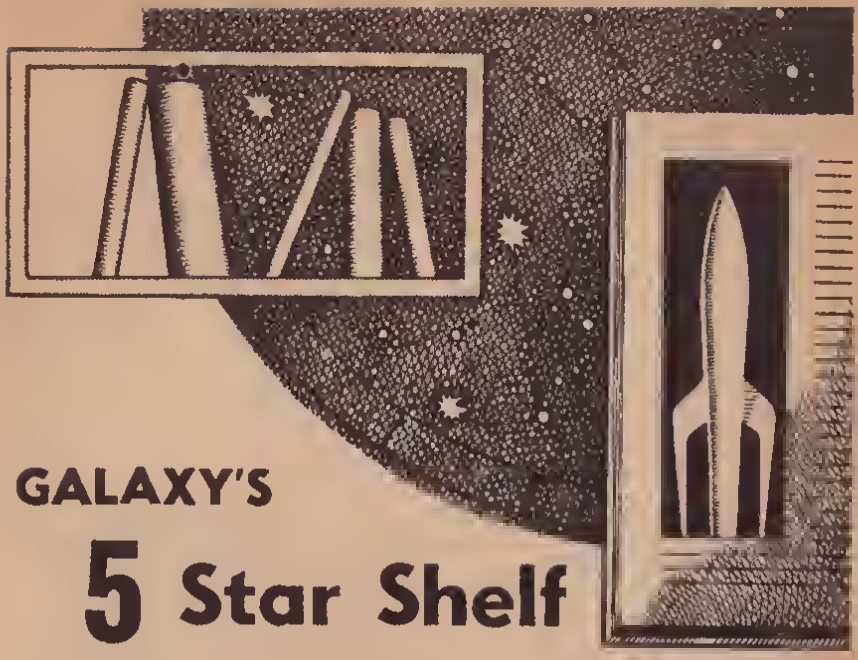
"But what about the torpedo?" asked Wimpy.

Bill patted the elaborate toy that hung at his right hip. "It had as much real punch as this. They were making believe that it was a vortex torpedo—they'd rigged it up with remote controls—but it was really only one of the little flyers that they turn out for the kids over there. It's an old one, but its interstellar drive is still working."

He paused, then said in an offhand manner, "I brought it back with me. It's got an adjustable warp field that'll open up wide enough to handle a ship the size of the *Glorious*, and I—well, it seemed to me that, maybe, it might get space travel going . . ."

It did.

—THEODORE R. COGSWELL



GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

DARK DOMINION by David Duncan. Ballantine Books, Inc., Cloth $2.50, *paper* 35c

THIS may prove to be the best original science fiction novel of 1954—despite the fact that it was serialized in *Collier's*, a magazine not generally noted for mature fiction. Unlike most slick science fiction, this tale makes no compromise with the so-called "lay" audience. It's not written down, or oversimplified, or cheapened in any way. You will find it enthralling and somber with a very sharp and pertinent point.

The plot deals with an attempt on the part of the United States to put up a space station with which we can control the world—our friends as well as our enemies. The effort makes us rather unpopular.

Mixed in with this grim main plot is a subplot dealing with the discovery and use of a completely new form of matter known as Magellanium—and is one of the most exciting concepts in modern science fiction.

It's an impressive book, done with the skill of a practiced novelist and the respect for human

values of a richly endowed mind. Don't miss it!

OPERATIONAL PHILOSOPHY by Anatol Rapoport. Harper & Bros., $3.75

FOR all those readers who have been fascinated, yet at the same time confused, by such new concepts of thought as "non-Aristotelian logic," "symbolic logic," Boolean algebra and so on, this book will come as a godsend.

Most previous volumes on these subjects have, for the layman, been much too technical and often stuffily pedantic; Korzybski's works, for example.

In the present book, on the other hand, we bave a lucid, beautifully simple analysis of many of the modern discoveries in thinking that have grown out of the original breaking away from Aristotle's narrow concept of logic. In addition, the author presents a splendidly unified philosophy based on these new ideas.

You will be amazed at how fruitful, in almost all fields of thought and action, this new approach can be. For instance, it is remarkable how much light it throws on the validity of many of the more mature science fiction stories of our time.

It is not a book for people who operate wholly on the basis of preconceived notions. For those who are willing to re-examine the very foundations of their dominant ideas, bowever, a creative—and disturbing—experience.

REVOLT IN 2100 by Robert A. Heinlein. Shasta Publishers, $3.50

NO question about it, the Old Master is still "the best story teller in the science fiction field today," as Henry Kuttner states in his introduction to tbis, the third in the "Future History" series of Heinlein's novelets and short stories.

"If This Goes On—" which takes up nearly two-thirds of the book—is a smashing tale of revolution in the United States—a revolution against a theocratic dictatorship that takes place around the year 2100. It's been slightly fixed up, to modernize it (it first appeared in 1940), but essentially it's the same rowdy and terrifying tale it was in the first place.

"Coventry" takes up another 67 pages. In this tale, our civilization has reached maturity following the overthrow of the dictatorship, and the Coventry of the title is a huge enclosed area where the immature may go if they wish to experience "adventure," "excitement" and the "freedom" of the long-vanished frontier days. And they certainly get them all, with a vengeance,

in the Wild (human) Animal Reserve tbat Coventry really is.

"Misfit," which ends the book, is a fine short story about a boy whose great talents were not recognized until almost too late. Libby is a lesson to our whole educational system.

The book is a classic.

SPIDER'S WAR by S. Fowler Wright. Abelard Press, $2.75

THOUGH good reading from beginning to end, this melodrama of a distant future is not one of Wright's major efforts; it cannot rank with *Deluge*, for instance. On the other hand, the book is the strongest statement of Wright's corrosively pessimistic philosophy he has ever done.

In bis world of a distant future, there is limited cannibalism (wby waste good flesh in time of famine?) in a semi-cooperative, partly telepathic, primitive and yet sophisticated tribal society.

The conflicts are between two tribes of different culture levels, one on one bank of a wide river and the other on the opposite side; and, later, between both tribes against a small race of elephant-size spiders inhabiting a large peninsula where two rivers meet.

Mr. Wright characteristically seems to respect the spiders more than be does the humans.

BORN OF MAN AND WOMAN by Richard Matheson. The Chamberlain Press, Inc., $3.00

FOR a young man wbose first story was published in 1950, this collection represents a pretty solid achievement. It contains 17 of the best pieces, most of them in the horror field and a majority of them weird fantasy rather than science fiction. Tbey all bear the imprint of a distinctive and original talent, even thougb the influences of John Collier, Ray Bradbury, Philip MacDonald and others do show through.

One of the two unpublished stories in the book, "The Traveller," is almost the best thing it contains—a daring but thoroughly reverent view of the Crucifixion by a modern time-traveler. It's a story you will not easily forget.

Seven of the 17 stories have previously appeared in other anthologies, but even if you have them all, the 10 unanthologized ones are themselves worth the price of admission.

MISSION OF GRAVITY by Hal Clement. Doubleday & Co., $2.95

SCIENCE fiction's expert at making alien peoples seem completely real is at his best in this fantastic tale of a tiny race

living on a planet with almost unbearably heavy gravity. It is a highly technical piece of science fiction, not designed for the slick market, but it's definitely worth the effort.

The relations of the single human being stranded on the planet with the little caterpillarlike intelligences that are one of its dominant life-forms are warmly and realistically developed. And the innate plea for cooperation between all life that lies at the base of the book gives it a special kind of durability.

Clement's schoolmasterish tone, which critics have previously complained about, is present here, too. But I, at least, don't mind it.

WORLDS IN SPACE by Martin Caidin. Henry Holt & Co., $4.95

ALMOST monthly now, we have new books on Man's future in space. Little that is new remains to be said and Mr. Caidin does *not* say much of it. However, his book is a clear, nontechnical retelling of the ever-fascinating story of the coming age of space flight and our accomplishments (and defeats) made thus far toward bringing that age into being.

The black-and-white drawings by Fred L. Wolff are a bit too air-brushy for my taste, lacking the sharp clarity and realism of similar pictures by Bonestell, Hunter, Klep, et al., but they are imaginative and often handsome.

GATEWAY TO TOMORROW, edited by John Carnell. Science Fiction Club, London. Available in this country from science fiction bookstores for about $2.75

JOHN CARNELL'S second all-British science fiction anthology is as satisfactory as his first. Ten stories, of which seven are Class B or better—mostly As—is a high average. Included are four GALAXY tales — by Peter Phillips, John Wyndham, J. T. McIntosh and John Christopher.

Arthur Clarke has another A from *Astounding;* this is the only one that has thus far appeared in another anthology in the U. S.

Of the five from the British *New Worlds,* the one by E. C. Tubbs is quite good, the other four not really top grade.

Nevertheless, the book as a whole is a fine indication of the lusty health of science fiction writing in England.

UNTOUCHED BY HUMAN HANDS by Robert Sheckley. Ballantine Books, $2.50 and 35c

SHECKLEY'S first book presents 13 of his oddly flavored tales, six from the pages of this

magazine and seven from other publications. It is an extremely uneven collection, ranging from good ("The Monsters," "Cost of Living," and "Specialist," for example), down to rather derivative and fluffy stuff.

The book is a bouillabaisse of science fiction, fantasy, and weird stories; and you get something of a feeling that the young author (his first story appeared late in 1951, I believe) is still trying to discover his own particular bent—experimenting, in other words, with a wide variety of story types — and that he hasn't quite found his footing.

Still, it *is* a highly entertaining book.

HERO'S WALK by Robert Crane. Ballantine Books, $2.50 & 35c

AND still they come—second from Ballantine this month! —the books on the dangers of putting space stations and space rockets out into the great unknown. The present offering is a melodramatic one, dealing with dangers internal (a ruthless world dictator) and external (a galactic civilization afraid of us).

The dictator wants to explore beyond Mars, for his own personal aggrandizement, but the "Ampiti," a mysterious galactic race, warns us by strange radio messages (and later by actual physical attack) that we will be destroyed if we try it.

By overthrowing the dictator and coming to terms with the Ampiti, we finally arrive at a *modus vivendi*—or seem to.

It's a strong book, full of warnings to a primitive, war-minded, bureaucratically strangled world such as ours.

STARSHIP THROUGH SPACE by Lee Correy. Henry Holt & Co., $2.50

THIS somewhat condescending juvenile (he refers to his young heroes as "lads" and "boys") must be compared with Robert Heinlein's *Starman Jones*, (GALAXY, May, 1954), since they both deal with the first flights of faster-than-light ships. The comparison is a bit cruel.

Even though Correy's book is readable, has a lot of technical-sounding scientific discussion, and is erected on a simple and direct plot skeleton, it simply cannot stand up to its predecessor in characterizations, in style, in ingenuity, or in overall dramatic impact.

Nevertheless, the book does move, and if the juniors in your family have nothing better to do with their time, they won't, at least, be bored with it.

—GROFF CONKLIN

the departed

Let the dead past bury its dead?

No . . . leave the dirty work to the unborn future!

By ARTHUR SELLINGS

"As a sleep I must think on my days.
Of my path as untrod, Or trodden in dreams—"

YES, he was able to carry on the verse he had started as the switch had closed. He was still here—wherever here was—

"—in a dreamland whose coasts are a doubt:"
Whose countries recede from my thoughts as they grope round about.

What, he wondered, were the others thinking of at this moment? He thought to call out, to see if they answered, to see if they were still there—wherever there was.

But none of the others had called out. Or, if they had, he wasn't able to hear them, in which case it wasn't much use for him to shout. Or they hadn't, and he wasn't going to be the first. His voice might ring despairingly, ragged with panic, in the darkness. After all, he was their leader.

Illustrated by FLEMINGER

Leader! He chuckled inwardly. It was absurd, really. The whole thing was absurd—the solemn handshakes from the young man in the sober gray serge, the terse wishing of good luck as the moment of departure drew near. Departure? That was too easy a word. The right one was eviction.

And how did it go on?

"—And vanish and tell us not how."

Now that was appropriate. Strange that he should be reciting to himself a verse he had long ago forgotten. More—that he couldn't even remember ever having learned. Yet it was fitting; a piece, he thought, with the ends of so many other poets. How more appropriately could Rilke have died than in agony from the infected scratch of a rose? Or poor, mad de Nerval than by hanging himself upside down, like the Hanged Man of the Tarot pack, in a Paris sewer?

This was far less dramatic, more in keeping with the age that had turned him and the others out, but it was, he told himself, right in the tradition. Most poets were a pretty poor lot at managing their lives, but they usually seemed to get in a good piece of arranging at the finish.

Finish? But this wasn't. It was dark and silent and there was no feeling of ground beneath his feet. But this wasn't the finish—not yet, anyway.

OUT of confusion of decades, the continuing lines broke through:

"Be kind to our darkness,
O Fashioner, dwelling in light,
And feeding the lamps of the sky—"

His memory petered out at the same instant that he realized the darkness had lifted slightly and he was standing on solid ground again. It was still dark, but it was the darkness of night, not the absolute darkness of—wherever it was they had been.

He was conscious of several dark shapes standing by him. For a moment, they were hushed. He counted them. There were five. So they had all arrived. And he realized that this was why they had been silent. They had been counting, too.

Now they spoke and somebody fumbled for a torch. The light went gaping around the knot of old men, showing the fallen cheeks, the bald and the white heads, the bleary, surprised eyes.

"Well, we got here."

"But it's dark."

"All I could think of while I was out there was that I'd left

my false teeth behind."

"Hah, that's a good one."

"Jeez, but it's *cold!*"

The last statement brought realization to them all. They were chilled not only by fear and uncertainty.

"Where's the guy with the stove?"

Hawkins, the poet and the leader, looked down. Yes, the pack was at his feet, just as it had been when the switch had closed. He bent down and unzipped it. He lit the stove with hands that trembled from cold and tension. The men huddled around it, crouching, rubbing their hands, white plumes of their breath disappearing upward over the heat it gave forth.

"Mm-mm. Good piece of equipment." That was Bell, the old colonel. His voice still had the clipped quality of the professional officer. "Almost as good as the Mark Nine."

"I don't think I've ever been as cold as this," said Green, the carpenter.

"Perhaps there's been another Ice Age," Hawkins suggested.

"Not in seven hundred and fifty years." Who was that? Oh, Lindsay, the professorial-looking little man. Hawkins realized that he didn't know anything about him. There was no reason, of course, why he should. But he did know something about the others. They had chatted during the few minutes before they had been gathered into the chamber. Bell, Green, Hasse, an electrician. And Ez, whose surname hadn't been known even to the clerk. He'd survived one appeal, he had told Hawkins, and then, because there were no records, they had assessed him at retiring age, seventy. In fact, as he had confided with a wink while the attendant reached for the switch, he was nearly eighty-three.

"How can you say it's seven hundred and fifty years?" That was Bell again, his voice peremptory and querulous. Hawkins smiled to himself. Must have been a blow to the poor chap, a leader of men, not to be leader now on this pathetic and unretraceable excursion. Instead, he was under the command of a damned longhair. That's probably what he calls me, Hawkins thought, a damned longhair.

IN the light of the stove, Lindsay's lips made a downward self-deprecatory gesture before he replied. "I heard—on fairly reliable authority—that it was seven hundred and fifty years."

"Nobody's supposed to know," said Bell, "nobody at all"—in a tone which implied the added words, "not even me."

"It's somewhere between two hundred and a thousand years,

but the exact time's supposed to be strictly secret."

Strictly Secret, thought Hawkins, *Top Secret, To Be Read and Destroyed Immediately.* That must have been the circle, the delight of Bell's rigidly military life. It was all over, but he still clung to it.

"Does it really matter?" Hawkins asked mildly. "*Now?*"

Bell's eyes glared in the light. "Of course it matters. There have to be rules. Even in this business, everything should be aboveboard."

"Who cares about rules?" Hasse broke in. "I'm amazed that we've *arrived,* whatever century it is. I thought it was all a boax, a handy kind of gas-chamber for getting rid of us dodderers."

Bell snorted.

"It's funny," Hasse went on, as if talking to himself. "All my life, I thought that everything any of the high-ups told us was a lie. Whenever a politician opened his mouth, or a scientist, or a general, I always took what he said with a grain of salt. A whole sack of salt. And now . . ." He shrugged, not entirely without humor. "I had to wait till now to find out that it wasn't all hokum. Not this time, anyway. Unless—unless this is—" He stopped short at the thought.

"*Death?*" whispered Green.

Ez tittered. "That ain't so. Don't know about you folks, but it wouldn't be as cold as this where I'd be goin'."

But nobody else laughed.

"It's all *wrong,*" Green insisted. "It's heathen and unnatural." He was a quiet man who didn't look old the way the others did. He looked middle-aged, but as if he'd looked middle-aged all his adult life. "God didn't mean anything like this. He meant that men should live their lives out in a natural way, in the time and place He appointed for them. This way is plain un-Christian."

"From any viewpoint," said Bell firmly, "it's *unethical.* I never did agree with it. In the past few years, I've done a lot of lobbying against it. It's just not ethical for one community to shift its burdens onto the shoulders of another."

"Oh, I don't know, Colonel," Hawkins couldn't help saying. "It's only a kind of invasion. And this kind is peaceable, at least."

"*Pah!*" spat Bell. "War is a matter of dire necessity and it's the same for both sides. But the future never made war on us."

LINDSAY looked even more professorial as he leaned forward slightly into the light of the stove. "This *was* necessary. If it hadn't been done in our

day and age, there probably wouldn't have been a future, anyway. And the future will know it. This future *now* knows about *us*. We're a part of history to them. That's why our time only chose up to a thousand years, with the time carefully spaced out. Don't forget, little groups like us have been arriving for several centuries now."

Bell stirred again at the easy confidence of the period of their projection. "You seem to be well acquainted with all this."

Lindsay coughed self-effacingly. "Well, I am. You see, I'm—I was, that is—a geriatrician."

To men of a previous generation, the word wouldn't have been so familiar. But even old Ez knew what it meant.

"One of the enemy, eh?" he wheezed.

LINDSAY smiled uneasily. "Would you have preferred the Eskimo way, being turned out into the snow?"

"Wouldn't have been much different," said Hasse.

"This way," Lindsay retorted, "we have a chance to live out the rest of our lives. *We're* prejudiced because we're the ones it happened to. It was bad enough before the Global War. Afterward, with so much soil poisoned, so many mouths to feed, something drastic had to be done."

"They should have had compulsory sterilization," declared Bell. "That was the practical solution."

"But *that* would have been unethical, an infringement of fundamental human rights. Anyway, it wasn't the number of people that mattered. It was the number of *unproductive* people. We were the problem."

"I was still working as well as ever," said Green quietly.

"As quickly?" Lindsay asked just as quietly.

"I was a craftsman."

"And I was a scholar. But there had to be one time for everybody. I was thinking in the last few years that I was really beginning to know my subject at last. And now . . ." His voice faltered. "This, in a way, solves all the problems I ever grappled with. Funny how the human race always seems to turn up with an answer to its problems just in time. Come to think of it, being able to send people on a one-way trip into the future wasn't good for much else, was it?"

"The future!" Green repeated, his slow voice unexpectedly vehement. "I don't want to be in the future. The present was bad enough. Everything speeded up —quicker and quicker every year."

Hasse had been craning his neck, surveying the darkness.

"I'm beginning to think there's something phony about this, after all. If the future had heen expecting us, like Lindsay says, wouldn't they have got this area all fixed up? But I can't see sign of anything. No lights—nothing."

A SUDDEN thought came to Hawkins. Perhaps the future had resented the influx of tottering immigrants from the past. Perhaps they'd developed the time-projecting principle, found a way of diverting them into some limho that was neither past, present nor future.

"Jeez!" said Ez. "I've slept in the open more nights than not, but it was never as cold as this. If only I was *tired* and cold, instead of just cold, I might at least be able to get some shuteye."

Yes, that was a prohlem for them all, thought Hawkins. It seemed to symholize their situation. They had been sent on their way one sunny morning at nine o'clock, straight into a dark and hitter future night. He remembered an item of their communal pack, fumhled in its depths, among the first-aid equipment and emergency rations. He found what he was looking for and brought it out.

He smiled at the grotesque legality of it. The label read: *Supplied Duty-Free for Departers. For Medicinal Purposes Only.* He screwed out the cork and saw old Ez's rheumy eyes look up and glow at the familiar sound.

"Well," said Hawkins, "since it's obviously impossible to make a move before dawn, we might as well have something to warm us up." He handed the hottle around.

Only Green, when his turn came, hesitated. "I—I don't, that is, I never—"

"Medicinal," Hawkins interrupted reassuringly.

Green nodded gratefully and took a swig.

How we cling, thought Hawkins, to our little canons of respectability—even now! He took a gulp himself, recorked the hottle and stowed it hack in the hag. Ez smacked his lips expressively and looked heseechingly at him. Hawkins rezipped the hag, feeling a childish pleasure in the meager power his office gave him. There was something in being a leader of men. Perhaps he'd missed his vocation and the little tin gods at the departure center had seen his true worth, his latent qualities. He smiled. "Hawkins," he told himself, "you never did have a head for liquor."

But his thoughts ran on. What a stupid game it was, a stupid game for stupid old men. He could picture the serious reasoning that had gone into it all—the

endless reports from sub-committees, the graphs, the charts. The doctrine of social workers: "We must ensure that the Departers have a proper sense of purpose. They mustn't feel—unwanted. They must have a spirit of unity." That was what they had said to him and the others. But wasn't it the occupational disease of old people to feel unwanted? And *weren't* they unwanted?

He himself had been living for thirty years on a reputation, included in every anthology of living poets—simply because he had still been living. He thought of the little party of admirers who had met at his place the night before departure, of how they had made half-hearted jokes about his being the first poet actually to meet posterity.

Someone had slipped a copy of his first book in his pocket and winked and said, "First edition. Be worth a fortune in the future." He felt it in his pocket, thought of being a poet, thought of posterity, and found that he didn't care two hoots.

EZ had started on a mouth organ, playing plaintive old hobo songs that had been hoary even in 1990. The wiry, wily old bird played them with gusto—and very badly. The others stirred angrily and told him to lay off, but he stopped only to wheeze that he wasn't keeping anyone awake, was he, and went right on playing. The defiant strains of *Hallelujah, I'm a Bum* and *The Big Rock Candy Mountain* went fading into the black emptiness around them.

No one could play quite as badly as that by accident, thought Hawkins. Its badness was a work of art in itself.

Hawkins gave a sigh of capitulation and reached in the bag again. Ez lowered the mouth organ and, as the bottle came around again, he put the instrument away with a grin of triumph.

Hawkins put the empty bottle back in the bag. Protected now against the coldness of the night and the chill of their thoughts, the little group huddled closer to the stove and settled down to await the dawn. One by one, they fell asleep. Only Hawkins remained awake, not because he was leader, but because he was used to brooding through the long, dark hours of the night.

But even so, dawn was a long time in coming. At the first gray relief from darkness, the others were all awake. Stretching, grumbling, they tottered to their feet. The grayness began taking on undertones of pink.

The sight made Hawkins feel even colder.

"*Jeez!*" cried Ez.

In the wan light, the landscape was desolate. Back in 1990, it had been a pleasant enough spot, open green country that had escaped the ravages of war. But this was worse than the rubble of wsr. For here, as far as the eye could see in the half-light, was no sign of human habitation, no sign of *anything*. It was a bare, ashen desert.

"Not even a blade of grass," said Hasse in an awed voice.

Green began to sway and moan, his eyes rolling back. His lips moved. "And there shall come great desolation upon the Earth . . ."

"God!" muttered Lindsay.

Hasse wheeled on him, his face twitching. "It was a hoax. I should have known better than to believe you damned experts. Why didn't you just kill us?" He stumbled toward the mild-featured Lindsay. His bony fingers clawed at Lindsay's coat collar, his throat.

"Stop that!" shouted Hawkins, surprising himself by the note of authority in his voice. It astonished him even more that Hasse took his hands away. But his face was still filled with bitterness and loathing.

"He didn't do it," said Hawkins. "It's not his fault." He could see from Lindsay's face that this — this desolation had come as much a shock to him as to the rest of them.

"What do you make of it?" he asked the geriatrist.

LINDSAY rubbed the heel of a hand across his brow. "I don't know. I really don't know. This is out of my department."

"Well, there's no use moaning about it," said Bell stiffly. "If things have gone wrong, we shall have to make our plans accordingly." In his voice was the immemorial fatalism of the military man, stoically carrying on despite the incompetence of the armorers or supply men behind the front. Hawkins was grateful for the sobering effect of it.

"The city," Bell continued, "used to lie over there beyond the hills." But his pointing arm traversed a whole circle before it paused uncertainly and dropped. "There—there aren't even hills any more."

It was Ez who offered the only realistic suggestion. "Well, there's no help standing here in the cold. I'm for walking, now it's light."

"Sure," agreed Hawkins. "Somewhere there'll be a town and people." The only question was—*where?* No direction looked any less forbidding than the rest. "We'll travel east," he said firmly. At least they'd have the Sun in their faces—what there was of it.

Nobody objected. Silently, they turned their faces to the Sun. Hawkins stopped only to turn the stove off and swing it in the cold air till it was cool. Then he stowed it in his bag and slung it over his shoulder. The others slung on their smaller ration bags. And then they were walking.

Hawkins knew why they were walking, knew the thought that was in the minds of all of them, because it was in his mind, too. They would go on and on, trudging through this wilderness until they became too tired to notice the cold and the desolation, until they dropped in exhaustion, and that would be the end. It would be release.

And so they tottered forth toward the red wintry Sun while it slowly rose.

Hawkins understood two things as they stumbled along. The first brought a smile to his lips. He knew now, as the communal bag weighed heavily on his shoulders, just why they had chosen him as leader. Not because he was a born leader—but simply and brutally because he was the strongest. The second explained why they had passed Bell over. For he walked with a limp. He did his best to conceal it, Hawkins saw, and did his best to conceal that he was concealing it, but it was too apparent.

After they had gone a short way, he stumbled on a rough piece of ground, spun and fell. His game leg stuck out helplessly, as if it weren't a part of him. It wasn't, Hawkins realized, as he stooped to help him up. His eyes and Bell's met for an instant. And for an instant, the barricade of military self-control dropped and the man looked out. A man who admitted his disability and smiled briefly in gratitude at being helped. And then he was on his feet and dusting himself off.

"Thank you," he said stiffly. "That won't happen again." The barricade was up again. But Hawkins felt better and sensed that Bell did, too.

THE Sun cleared the horizon finally and seemed to hang there like a great bladder of blood. A wind rose now and picked up the dust, sending it in dismal eddies across the landscape. They went on, their pace gradually slowing. Hawkins began to feel the approach of ultimate exhaustion.

They had been going up a slight incline and Hawkins had not noticed it. And they had passed through a cleft in the bare rock. And below them . . .

"Look, a real city!"

"Hallelujah!"

It stood in the shallow valley

below them, less than a mile away.

And they were running, staggering, stumbling toward it, like men in a desert tottering toward the mirage of an oasis.

They were almost there before they stopped on a single impulse, gasping for breath.

"*But there's nobody there.*"

They felt it blowing out of the city, a wind of ageless antiquity. The city was built of uniform, hard, block stone and its buildings were still standing, undamaged. But they looked as if they had been buffed smooth by a giant hand. And that was the hand of time, of centuries . . . of eons.

They approached in awed silence, walking slowly — almost reverently.

They passed down a long street like mourners at a funeral.

"Wait," said Hawkins. His voice rang almost blasphemously in the silence. "Something moved there." He pointed at a glint of light between two buildings.

It was a fountain. In the age-old silence of the city, it played, pumping from some cistern underground. Watching it, grateful for some sign of movement, they did not notice the figure seated under a piece of eroded statuary. When it stirred slightly, they all jumped and faced it with a sharp drawing-in of breath.

"My God!" breathed Lindsay.

The figure was small. It looked like a five-month fetus, its head great and wrinkled and hairless. Its eyes looked upon them without wonder — without interest even. It seemed not to be hostile. It seemed *incapable* of hostility.

Hawkins advanced falteringly toward it. He was conscious of the rest shuffling behind him, grouping at his back.

He said, "Good morning."

THE creature did not speak. It inclined its head very slightly, but that might have been coincidental.

Hawkins felt silly, but he added, "Greetings," feeling that to be more formal and thus more correct in a situation like this. "We come from the past."

Hasse grumbled in his ear, "We're not on Earth at all. We've been shifted in space, not time. This is Mars, I bet."

Still the creature before them did not speak. The only expression in its eyes was one of utter weariness.

"This is Mars," Hasse said again, eagerly. "It's colder on Mars. I remember reading—"

"This isn't Mars," stated Hawkins. "The Sun wouldn't look as big as this on Mars. This is Earth, all right — but in God knows what remote future. Some-

thing must have gone wrong with the projector. Or maybe the callibration is only window dressing or guesswork. This isn't seven hundred and fifty years in the future. It's millions!"

"And that, then?" Lindsay said, gesturing at the hunched-up figure by the fountain.

"Jeez!" gasped Ez. "He looks a thousand years old."

"Why doesn't he speak?" Hasse asked.

"Perhaps he hasn't anyone to speak to any more," said Lindsay thoughtfully.

"*We're* here. He could speak to *us*."

"In English?"

The thought that a language called English had faded back in the depths of time shocked Hawkins at first, then made him feel strangely glad, light-hearted, relieved at last of a heavy burden. He remembered all that wrestling with words to convey this or that shade of meaning. Once it had seemed so important, so desperately important. But now it took its insignificant place in the dust of the ages. All the striving, all the poetry and music, all the machines, all the great philosophies came in the end to this—an old, old man, sitting in front of a fountain, watching the waters playing.

Was that all? Had Man never done all those things he was going to do? Was he never to find the secret at the heart of atom and universe, send ships to the stars, become wholly good, wholly wise?

Lindsay began to laugh. He stopped to gasp, "Age! I never knew what the word meant."

Hawkins dazedly knew that that was the way they were all feeling. Old men cast out from a young and struggling world, they were the youngest ones alive—by years, centuries, eons!

ALL of them straightened, their backs unbent from the load of years. And when Ez pulled out his mouth organ, they skipped to the music like six-year-olds. Even Bell. Even Green. They joined in the chorus like kids at a picnic.

"For an old man he is old,
And an old man he is gray,
But a young man's heart is full of love.
Get away, old man, get away!"

Hawkins frowned uncomfortably for a moment, feeling the irreverence of it. After all, that man might be the last man—the very last.

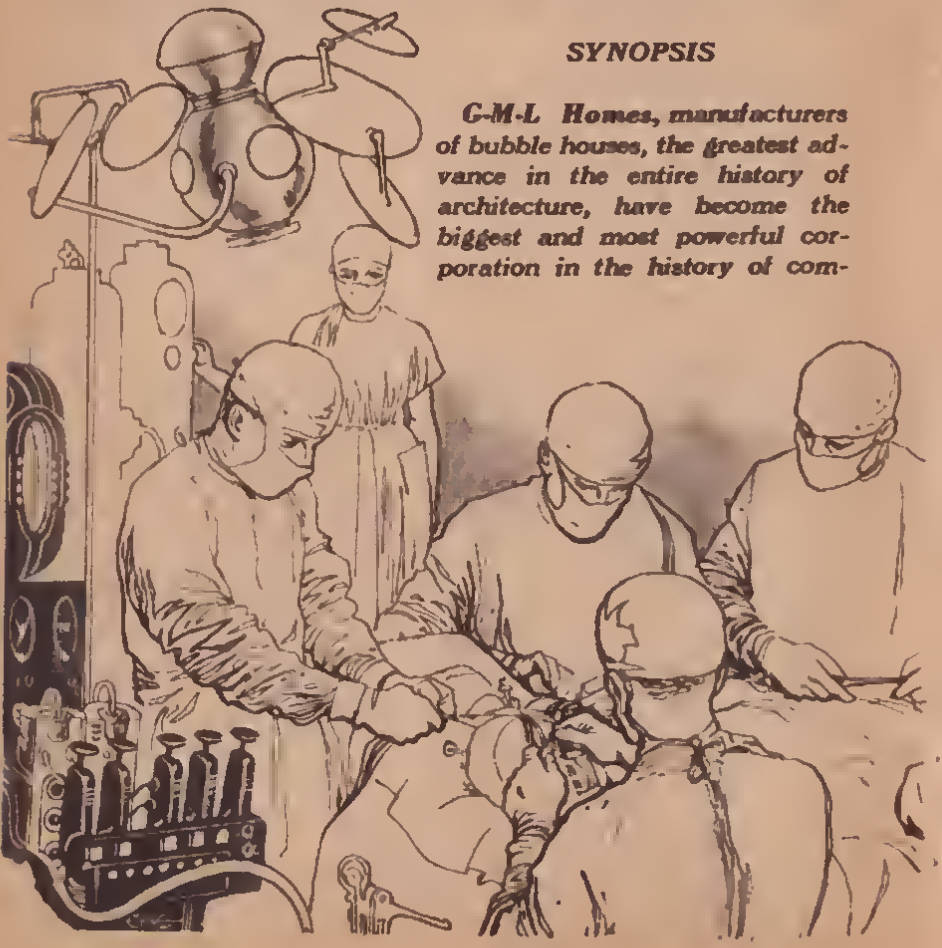
But the figure seemed not to hear them. It just sat there, looking into the fountain, as unnoticing as an old man on a park bench might be of children running and playing around him.

—ARTHUR SELLINGS

Gladiator at Law

CONCLUSION OF A 3-PART SERIAL

Swiftly now, the authors of Gravy Planet draw together this story's plot threads—into a sizzling fuse for a time bomb!



SYNOPSIS

***G-M-L Homes,** manufacturers of bubble houses, the greatest advance in the entire history of architecture, have become the biggest and most powerful corporation in the history of com-*

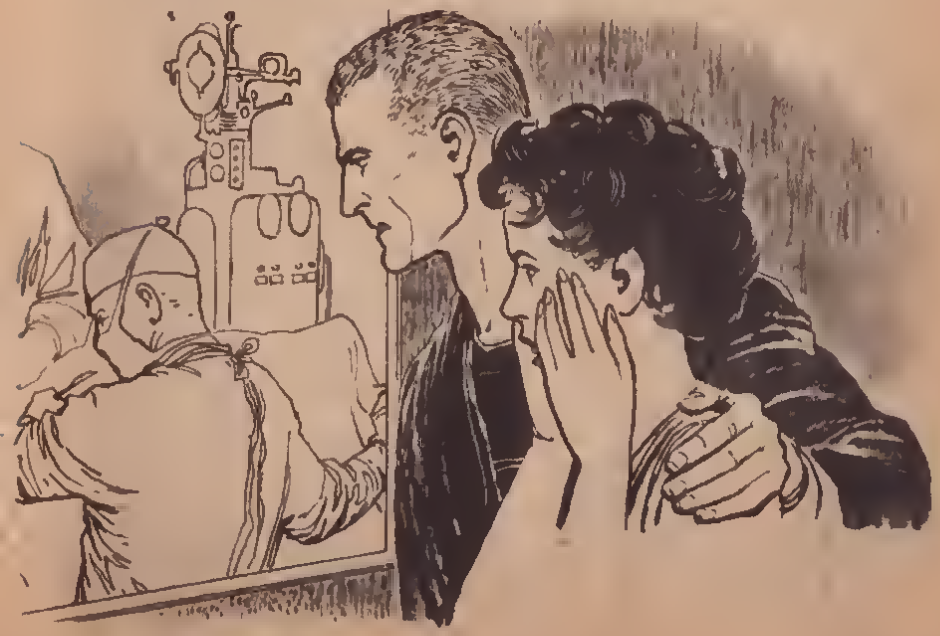
By FREDERIK POHL & C. M. KORNBLUTH

Illustrated by EMSH

merce. Its bubble houses, rather than being on the open market, go with contract status for those with jobs.

Belly Rave or its local equivalent—and every city has one—is where those without contract status live, if existence in the wretched squalor of those brawling thieves' dens can be called living. Slums that once were suburban developments ("Picture Window, Expansion Attic for your Growing Family"), Belly Rave, the future corruption of Belle Reve Estates, and its like are the neglected result of G-M-L's breakthrough in architecture.

Charles Mundin, a criminal lawyer, starving because he was not fortunate enough to be born into one of the corporate-law dynasties, has had only one case, that of:



Norvell Bligh, whose specialty is dreaming up bloody events for Field Days, the future equivalent of Roman circuses, and who is being nagged by his wife to adopt her daughter Alexandra, born in Belly Rave of a previous marriage. Bligh, however, has been doublecrossed into loss of contract status and his bubble house, and has been moved into Belly Rave by a police convoy. Meanwhile, Mundin finds himself the recipient of a doubtful political favor, the case of:

Norma and Don Lavin, offspring of the Lavin who invented the bubble house and whose initial is the L of G-M-L Homes. Through legal trickery after their father's death, Norma and Don's 25 per cent share of all G-M-L stock has been tied up . . . and Don, the victim of severe conditioning that has left him vacant-eyed, is unable to remember where the stocks are or even to discuss the matter. He and his sister Norma live in Belly Rave with:

Ryan, an old-time corporation lawyer, who has ruined himself through his addiction to the opiate, yen pox. He can still act as attorney of record and strategist, however, while Mundin does the legwork. The new combination evidently worries G-M-L, for Norma disappears.

Lana, boss of the juvenile Belly Rave gang known as the Wabbits, will do practically anything for a price, including major surgery on a face with a broken bottle. Her scouts confirm Mundin's suspicion that Norma has been snatched. Coached by Ryan, Mundin visits the New York Parimutuel Stock Exchange. By luck, shrewdness and the illegal assistance of a broker, he manages to buy one share of G-M-L common stock. This makes Mundin eligible to attend the G-M-L stockholders' meeting. He manages to interest three important stockholders in his tale of representing a lost 25% of the stock, for they are eager to slip a knife into the existing directorate. He further uses them to force the release of Norma Lavin, who has become as important to Mundin as the case itself.

Hubble, Coett and Nelson, the three stockholders whose aid Mundin had enlisted, being hardheaded, realistic financial raiders, will back him only if he produces the huge block of G-M-L shares he has been talking about. They give him until morning to do so. But how do you go about finding it when the only person who knows where it is goes into convulsions when it's mentioned—and when conditioning or deconditioning is a quasi-legal process, reserved exclusively to the state for treatment of criminals,

and a heinous crime in private practice?

XVII

IT was a ghastly night. Norma Lavin snapped, "You could have stalled them."

"Stalled them how?" Mundin asked, needled into snapping back at her. "One hint of indecision and they'd have pulled out."

"And where did you think we'd find the stock?"

He looked hopefully at Ryan. "What about the possibility of duplicate certificates?"

"Overnight?" Ryan said. "A thing like that takes weeks—assuming there's no hitch, and G-M-L will create as many hitches as they can—and then there is still the question of Don's conditioning against remembering where the stock is and being able to vote it."

He was jittering badly, although he had doped himself almost blind during the argument. He took another yen pox pill and his eyes began to close.

"That's great," Mundin grumbled. "Now he's no help."

Norma said contemptuously, "And you are, I suppose. At least *he* didn't make any stupid promises."

"Maybe Don can give us a hint. One is all we'd need. They might not have blocked *all* his memories about—"

"Leave him alone! You said you'd produce the stock. All right, produce it, but not by tormenting him!"

Mundin knew it was desperate and cruel when he pushed past her and shook the boy awake, but at the very first question, Don Lavin's eyes stretched wide in terror and he stammered, "K-k-k-k-k-" and began to cry.

"I'm sorry," Mundin said inadequately and went back into the ramshackle living room while she glared at him and tried to calm her frightened brother. "Now what?" he asked Ryan.

The old attorney roused slightly. "Tellmtruth," he mumbled.

"What?" Mundin exclaimed. "Who? About what?"

"Hubblenthothers. 'Bou' Don. Stockenconditionnn."

Revolted, Mundin watched the drugged lawyer slide back into his opiate dreamworld, where problems like this could be solved magically just by telling the truth. It was idiotic and he didn't give the suggestion another thought. There *had* to be a way out. All they had to do was think of one.

But Ryan was doped and Don Lavin had fallen into an easy sleep again, protected by his conditioning as much against residual terror after questioning as

from talking or doing anything about his G-M-L shares, and Norma was furious at Mundin.

When morning came, he had blearily decided to do what he should have done in the first place—somehow put off Hubble, Coett and Nelson. Ryan, however, insisted that he bring Don along just in case.

AT Hubble's house, Mundin tried to be evasive, but Coett said impatiently, "Look, this represents a huge gamble for us. If you've just been bluffing and haven't got the stock, come right out and say so, but don't try using excuses on us—we know them all."

And Mundin, knowing he was blowing the case, hating himself because he hadn't come up with *the* solution, told them the truth.

"How do we know this isn't another stall?" demanded Nelson.

"Ask Don where the stock is," Mundin said tiredly.

They did, and got the same fright reaction, and the same anger from Norma, and Hubble admitted uncomfortably, "It's real, all right. Nobody could imitate conditioning that well."

"And there's the way Arnold acted at the meeting," Coett added. "*He* knew the Lavin stock was no phony."

Mundin listened to them in bewilderment. Drugged or not, Ryan was the better lawyer; he had come up with the right answer. They had accepted the shameful truth where they had rejected excuses and delays, and now they were discussing ways and means, shrewdly, clear-headedly, as if conditioning were just another problem in finance.

"We could get duplicate certificates," Mundin offered, which was accepted as a possibility when everything else failed; they shared Ryan's belief that G-M-L would put every obstacle in their way.

"I know a doctor," Hubble said quietly.

Coett and Nelson nodded as though a vote had been taken.

"But deconditioning is illegal!" Mundin protested. "We can't be parties to—"

"Hah!" Norma snorted in scorn.

"Who said anything about deconditioning?" asked Hubble. "The boy needs an operation, that's all."

So Don Lavin had himself a brain tumor. A highly reputable diagnostician analyzed it as a spongioblastoma, the commonest and most malignant of the intracranial gliomas. He recommended immediate surgery and then bought himself a new Rolls 'copter with power doors, power windows, ramp and steering.

The surgeon he suggested was in Wichita and had a private hospital. He extirpated the spongioblastoma — or at least the hospital Tissue Committee examined what he said he had removed from Don Lavin's brain, and this indisputably was spongioblastoma multiforms, consisting of round, elongated and piriform cells, characteristically recalling the varied cytological picture in osteogenic sarcoma of bone.

The surgeon then put down a sizable deposit for a new wing for his hospital.

CHRONICALLY suspicious, Norma scowled down at her brother, mumbling under the last of the anesthesia. She said to Mundin, "He might have left him an idiot. What better way to cover his tracks?"

Mundin sighed. They had, purely on her insistence, watched the surgery. The lights, the sterilizers, the hole saw. The wisp of scorched smell from the bone, the nerve-wrenching moment when the disk of skull lifted out. Insertion of anode and cathode needles, minute electroshocks that smashed this pattern, blurred that memory, shattered one or another reflex into neuronic rubble. The hours before of endless tests and questions, the strobe flickers in Don's eyes, the miles of EEG tape, the mapping of Don's brain and its workings.

Norvell Bligh, handy little man, looked in. "Doctor's coming," he said and, faithful little man, resumed his post outside the door.

Dr. Niessen asked them, "Anything yet?"

Don chose that moment to open his eyes and smile at Norma. "Hello, Sis. It feels better now." Norma burst into tears and Dr. Niessen looked mightily relieved.

"Check the blockage," the doctor suggested to Mundin. "We can find out now if we've done it."

Don said, "The stock? Safe-deposit box 27,993, Cosbocton First National. Identification—picture of me, my fingerprints, code phrase, "Gray, my friend, is all theory and green life's golden tree'. " He explained chattily, "Goethe. Dad used to say that one a lot after they put the boot to him. It used to cheer him up a little."

Dr. Niessen asked formally, "Is that essentially it?"

Norma choked and said, "Have you got it all back, Don? All?"

Her brother winced. "Oy, have I! Including the time they worked on me. That part I don't *want* to remember."

The doctor muttered, "Barbarous. We're all lawbreakers here, but I'm glad of it in this

case. Mr. Kozloff—" That was Don's pseudonym—"are you able to verify my conjecture that flicker-feedback was the principal means employed?"

"I guess so, if flicker-feedback is them shining a light in your eyes and you go into convulsions."

"That's it. Well, Mr. Kozloff, I think you've recovered from your tumor. One of the staff physicians will check you for traveling. Come back if there's anything new. In these spongioblastomas, there is always a slight possibility that some malignant tissue was overlooked. And if you can possibly arrange it, Mr. Kozloff, please don't bring your sister."

Bligh opened the door for him. Mundin followed him out into the corridor for a smoke and refuge from the touching reconciliation scene. But he could bear it even out there.

THE Columbus manager of Brinks-Fargo looked skeptical. "Now have I got this straigbt? Armored truck from here to Coshocton First National, guarded pickup of securities from there and immediate overland trip to New York, you four riding all the way. Right?"

"Right," Mundin said.

"Twelve thousand, five hundred dollars," the manager said after some scribbling. "For our biggest and best, with six guards."

'It was paid.

The pickup went off smoothly. A conditioned clerk handed over the little box in which were certificates of Don Lavin's fantastic claim to 25 per cent of G-M-L.

Mundin examined them wonderingly as the armored, eight-wheeled land cruiser rolled bumpily through the streets of Coshocton. Three and one-half billion dollars at par, he kept saying to himself. Three and one-half billion dollars at par. He felt numb.

Don, who had been revealed by conditioning as a happy-go-lucky kid, whispered to him, "Confidentially, I'd swap those things for a lifetime lease on a bubble house and fifty bucks a week pocket money. But Norma—you know. And maybe she's right. The responsibility and everything," he added vaguely.

Norvell Bligh, inevitably, was the one sitting uncomfortably on a couple of folded money sacks. Only three welded-steel seats in the locked middle compartment where they rode as passengers. He hoped tbe ride would go on forever, jolts to the spine and all. *He* was *working*.

Hubble said, when they arrived, "Did it work, Don?"

Coett said, "If that sawbones couldn't deliver after all his big talk—"

Nelson said, "I hope it didn't cost too much—"

"I'm all right, tbanks," Don Lavin said.

"And," Mundin told them casually, "we came back through Coshocton."

They examined the stock certificates with awe, then gloating.

"We're in," Coett said decisively, "as of the next stockbolders' meeting. Three months —plenty of time to shake the firm and pick up all we need for a majority. My God, a *majority!* Gentlemen, I move we now turn this operation over to Mr. Mundin. He understands us and we have, in addition to our usual activities, to pick up stock as it becomes available. Mr. Mundin, with an expense account of seven hundred and fifty thousand, will easily see to it that it *does* become available, I am sure."

COETT looked like some aged, still-ferocious jungle predator, and quite suddenly Mundin began to loathe him. The tactics, he thought, were disgusting and anti-social. Thus far, he had been persuaded by their papa-knows-best attitude and by the fact that Don Lavin, conditioned, had been his only talking point. Deconditioned and in possession of his stock certificates now . . .

"I've been meaning to ask you gentlemen whether the smear against G-M-L is absolutely essential," Mundin said.

They were quite ready for him. Coett snapped, "That's a closed question, Mundin. I'm sure Mr. Lavin realizes that we're doing what's best for him. Don't you, Don?"

Tbe boy said, "I don't really give a damn, Mr. Coett. Talk to Sis. You'll have to, anyway."

Norma was undecided. "Old Ryan says your plans are quite routine under the circumstances and I have a great deal of faith in him. I suppose—I suppose the important thing is to get it *done.*"

Coett spread his hands. "There's your answer, Mundin. Now about—"

"Hold it, please," said Mundin. "I'm still not—"

"Mundin," Coett broke in sharply, "will you, for God's sake, come to your senses? This thing is still a gamble and it's our money everybody's gambling with."

"Absurd quibbles about destroying some paper values," Nelson sniffed. "You don't understand these things. And I heartily endorse Mr. Coett's reminder that *we* are putting up the capital to enable Mr. Lavin to realize his claim of interest."

"Smear's the word," Mundin said after a pause, feeling heavy-hearted.

"Fine," agreed young Hubble,

but Mundin thought there was a twist to his mouth when he said it.

"Now," said Coett, "it is conceivable that Green, Charlesworth may take an interest in the contemplated operation. If they *should* show up, Mundin, don't try to handle it yourself. Buck it to us. They have the reputation of not dealing with intermediaries."

"Noted," Mundin said. Green, Charlesworth. Insurance and bankers' bankers. Old man Ryan had mentioned them.

"Then we're ready to rip and tear," said Coett. "Go get 'em, Mundin. You've got three months and seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars to get them with."

Mundin nodded, but he felt shaky inside. It didn't seem like much against the fourteen billion dollars G-M-L had.

XVIII

ONE month after the go-ahead, Del Dworcas, Regular Republican county committee chairman, stood incredulously before an office door. The sign said:

RYAN & MUNDIN
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

The office occupied a solid floor through of a very good building. All he knew, standing there, was that Charles Mundin, his foredoomed candidate in the 27th ward, had first become inaccessible to him and then had moved and then had formed a partnership with somebody named Ryan and then—but there the stories became incredible. Dworcas had to check for himself.

He took several long, deep breaths before he pushed the door open and announced himself to a ripely curved blonde receptionist.

"Pleased be seated, Mr. Dworcas," the girl cooed. "Mr. Mundin asked me to tell you that you'll be the *very* next person he sees."

The dozen or so other individuals in the waiting room glared at Del Dworcas. However, being a professional politician, he had no difficulty in striking up a conversation with the fellows nearest him.

One was a petrochemist who understood there were consultant jobs opening up at Ryan & Mundin. Another was a publishers' bright young man who thought there must be a whale of a story in old man Ryan's sensational comeback and stood ready to sign it up. The others were easy enough to tag—a couple of crackpots, two attorneys obviously seeking affiliation with the new firm, a handful of persons

who seemed to be in the market for lawyers, and had suddenly come to think that it might be a good idea to retain Ryan & Mundin.

Nobody in the waiting room seemed to have any idea of what, if anything, was going on in the remainder of the enormous suite.

Dworcas—being a professional politician—was able to absorb information, pump for more, evaluate what he had heard and speculate on its meaning. But the answers were slight and cloudy. All he could make out for sure was that Ryan & Mundin were rising like a rocket and plenty of shrewd operators were trying to hitch a ride.

At last he got the nod from the receptionist. A hard-faced young Ay-rab with a badge that said *Guide* took him in tow.

Ryan & Mundin operated the damnedest law offices that Dworcas, in a full life, had ever seen. Law offices . . . complete with such eccentricities as chemistry labs and kitchens, living quarters and a TV studio, rooms locked off from his view, and open rooms that he could make no sense of.

DWORCAS said tentatively, "You must be proud to be working for Mr. Mundin. Of course you know his record with our Party in the 27th—right down the line for Arab rights."

"That's nice," the Ay-rab said. "Right in here, mister." He guided Dworcas into a bay. It lit up with a shimmering violet light; the Ay-rab scanned a fluoroscope screen. "You're clean. In that door."

"You searched me!" Dworcas gasped. "Me! Mr. Mundin's oldest friend!"

"That's nice," the Ay-rab said. "In that door."

Dworcas went through the door.

"Hello, Del." Mundin was abstractedly checking off items on a list.

He said, "Excuse me," and picked up an interoffice phone. Five minutes later, he put it down, glanced at Dworcas, and turned to another list.

Dworcas, in cello tones, said, "Charles . . ."

Mundin looked at him with annoyance on his face. "Well?"

Dworcas waved a finger at him, smiling. "Charlie, you're not treating me right. You really aren't."

"Look, Del, business has picked up," said Mundin tiredly. "I'm busy. What do you want?"

"Nice office you've got. G-M-L fix it for you?"

"What do you think?"

Dworcas retained his smile. "Remember who got you in with G-M-L?"

"You've got a point," Mundin conceded unwillingly. "It isn't going to do you much good, though. I haven't got time for favors. Some other time, I'll listen closer."

"I want you to listen now, Charlie. I want you to reconsider on the race."

Mundin stared. "Run for the *Council?*"

"I know it sounds like small potatoes. But it can lead to big ones, Charlie. You can do it. And what about us? You owe me—the Party—all of us something for putting you on to the Lavins. Is this the time to let us down? I'm not too proud to beg if I have to. Stick with the Party, boy! We can make a real race of it. Media space and time—rallies—literature — sound trucks — street meetings—we're in the running again, boy!"

"Sorry, Del," Mundin said patiently.

"Charlie!"

Mundin looked exasperated. "Del, you old crook, just what are you up to now? Suppose I did sink some time and some dough into the election—which I won't. But suppose I did. You'd be in serious trouble if we won, Del. This is the year when the Regulars take a fall in the Council and the Reforms take a fall in the Statewide. What are you going to do, break the agreement?"

THE politician leaned forward, his face completely changed. "I underestimated you, Charlie. I'll tell you the God's truth. No, normally I wouldn't break the agreement; I'd be crazy. But something's on the fire. I never miss on something like this. I feel it through the soles of my feet."

He had Mundin's full attention now. "What do you feel?"

Dworcas shrugged. "Little things. Jimmy Lyons, for instance. Remember him—the captain's man at the precinct?"

"Sure."

"He isn't any more. Captain Kowalik transferred him out to Belly Rave. Why? I don't know why, Charlie. Jimmy had it coming to him, sure. But why did it happen? And what's happening to Kowalik? He's losing weight. He can't sleep nights. I asked him why and he wouldn't tell me. So I asked somebody else and I found out. Kowalik's trouble is that Commissioner Sabbatino doesn't talk to bim any more."

"And what's the matter with Sabbatino?" Mundin was playing with a pencil.

"Don't kid me, Charlie. Sabbatino's trouble is a man named Wheeler, who had a long, long talk with him one day. I don't know what about. But I know Wheeler works for Hubble and Hubble is one of your clients."

Mundin put the pencil down. "So what else is new?" he asked.

"Don't joke, Charlie. What about the Ay-rabs? There's a crazy rumor they're all going to be moved into G-M-L Homes. The old folks don't like the idea. Some of the young folks do, so there are family fights. A dozen riot calls a day in the 27th. So I asked my brother Arnie, the engineer with G-M-L. You met him, you know what a fathead he is. But even he feels something in his organization. What *do* we feel, Charlie?"

A secretary person—with a start, Dworcas recognized his brother's friend, Bligh—put his head in the door. "Excuse me, Mr. Mundin, but they phoned from the landing stage that they're holding the D.C. 'copter for you."

Mundin nodded. "Look, thank them, Norvie, and ask them if they can give me five more minutes. I'll be free shortly." He glanced at Del Dworcas.

Dworcas said, "You're busy, Charlie. I'll see you some other time. I just want you to remember that I'm leveling with you."

"Good-by, Del," Mundin said cordially.

Then to Bligh, after Dworcas was gone, he said, "Thanks, Norvie. You were very smooth. Let's walk over to Mr. Ryan's office."

Bligh said, "We can't stay too long. The 'copter really does leave in twenty minutes."

RYAN, as usual, was snoozing with great dignity at his desk. He looked good, considering. His yen pox pills were rationed to him these days and he accepted it with good grace. His confusing explanation was, "As long as you *know* you can get your hands on them, you can say 'no' most of the time. It's when you can't possibly get them that you've *got* to have them." As a consequence, his very able brain had cleared and he was able to work for as much as an intensive hour at a stretch. He had evolved personally most of the 78 basic steps of tackling G-M-L.

Mundin reported Del's conversation carefully. In effect, it was that steps one through twenty-four were clicking nicely.

"A very pleasant miasma of doubt and confusion," Ryan declared. "I am gratified, Charles. There is no public-opinion poll as sensitive as the judgment of a professional politician—but we will, of course, continue with the polling as a matter of course. You have reason to be proud."

"Have I?" Mundin asked glumly. "Spreading doubt and confusion? Knifings every night in the 27th ward?" He felt instant regret as the old man's face drooped. "Excuse me, Mr. Ryan.

Perhaps I've been working too hard."

Ryan said slowly, "Yes, at the wrong things. You remember the state I was in when we first met?"

Mundin did. The old man had been disheveled, very sick with withdrawal symptoms, in a smoke-filled Belly Rave slum.

"It was partly Green, Charlesworth that brought me to that sorry state. Partly Green, Charlesworth and partly conscience. Don't strain yours too far, Charles."

Mundin found bimself engaged in an elaborate justification of the role he was playing, explaining to the gently smiling, nodding old man that of course there was a good end in sight, that he wouldn't be touching the thing if it were just for money, that they were out to end the contract-rental system in G-M-L.

Bligh touched his elbow and muttered, "I think Mr. Ryan is asleep again." He was. "And we really ought to head for the 'copter deck now."

They did, and took their seats in the big Washington-bound craft. Mundin said fretfully, "We ought to have a couple of executive ships of our own. There's going to be more and more ground to cover. Put somebody on it, will you, Norvie?"

Bligh made a note.

Mundin asked, "When do you get in touch with Del's brother? We can't stall on it any longer. We've got to have those serial numbers or today's work—and the whole buildup to it — is wasted."

"Tomorrow all right?" Bligh inquired.

"Fine, fine."

HE took a briefcase from Bligh, shuffled through reports he ought to read, memoranda he ought to sign, notes he ought to expand. He irritably stuffed them back into the case.

Incredibly, Bligh said to him, "Conscience, Charles," and winked.

"You don't know what it's like, Norvie! You don't have the responsibility, so don't try to kid me out of it. Let's just talk; I don't have to be a criminal again until we walk in on the museum. How've things been with you?"

Bligh considered. "Well," he said, "Virginia's pregnant."

Mundin was genuinely shocked. "Norvie, I *am* sorry! I hope you're not going to do anything foolish—"

Bligh grinned. "The kid's mine. First thing I did was drag her to an immunochemist and get that settled. How's *your* girl?"

"Huh?"

"Norma Lavin."

"You're dead wrong there.

We can't stand each other. And on my side, there's full justification."

"Sure," said Bligh soothingly. "Say, can we boost the allowance for the Wabbits? Lana was hinting."

"Why not? But do you think it's doing any good? A bunch of kids, after all. I don't think the rumors they spread ever get over to grownups."

"We can test easily enough. Launcb one through the Wabbits alone. See bow it compares in the polling."

"Okay, Norvie, have it done. No raise for the Wabbits until then, though. How's your foster-daughter, by the way?"

"I'm almost proud of her. Came home five days running, beaten to a pulp. Sixth day, not a mark! She's a Burrow Leader in the Wabbits now. And she closes her mouth when she chews and calls me 'sir.' Why, I practically *like* the little witch!"

Mundin felt a sudden flash of insigbt. "That's wby you're still living in Belly Rave, isn't it?"

Bligh got defensive. "Maybe that's part of it. But there's something to be said for Belly Rave. When you can install a water tank and a generating system and fix your place up—it's kind of lively." His voice rang with civic pride. "In our block, we've organized a real volunteer police force, not one of those shakedown squads, and there's talk in the blocks around us of doing the same."

Mundin said, "One day, who knows? Norvell Bligh, first mayor of New Belly Rave!"

The little man was suddenly gray; he fiddled with the earpiece of bis hearing aid. "Make it a joke if you want to," he said, hurt. "The fact is they like me. I'm doing something for them—in a small way at first—and something has got to be done for these millions of outcasts. *From the inside.* I'm a funny-looking little man and I'm deaf and you automatically thought what you did when I said Virginia was pregnant. So what are you doing for Belly Rave, big man?"

"Norvie, I'm sorry! I didn't dream you were that serious about it—"

"Doesn't matter. Here's Washington."

THE Museum of the National Association of the Builders of the American Dream had once been a proud idea, built with the contributions of businessmen and schoolcbildren. But the American Dream was mere history in this G-M-L era, like Pax Romana or Brittania's rule of the waves—words that had meaning only for the dead. The Museum remained, as the Pyramids had, but with the

difference that the Pyramids needed no maintenance or staff. Of all this Mundin was reminded when he entered the shabby building and found his way to the anteroom of the director's office.

The withered secretary said to the gentlemen from New York, "Dr. Proctor is a *very* busy man. You must write or telephone for an appointment."

Mundin said gently, "Please tell the director that it is in connection with a rather substantial bequest. If it isn't convenient for him to see us now, we'll be glad to come back at some other time—although we don't expect to be in the city long . . ."

The director came flying out of his office, beaming.

The attorney introduced himself.

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Munsen! Even here, even in our remote and dedicated corner of the world, we have heard of your firm. Might one ask the name of—"

"Sorry."

"Oh, I quite understand, Mr. Munchkin! And the — ah — amount?"

"Flexible," Mundin said firmly. "My client has commissioned me to inspect the Museum and report to him on which departments seem most deserving of additional support."

"Ah! Pray allow me to guide you, sir. Just through here is the Collection of—"

Mundin said blandly, "I think we would prefer to see the Hall of Basics first."

Dr. Proctor very nearly frowned. At the last minute, he changed and merely looked confidential. "For the general public," he said, nudging Mundin. "Gimmicks and gadgets. Not *important*, though perhaps of some limited interest to the engineer, the sociologist, that sort of person. Now our collection of Coelenterates, just through—"

"The Hall of Basics, please?"

"Mr. Monkton! A tourist trap, I assure you. On the other hand, the Coelenterata—which happen to be my specialty, I might add—"

Mundin said sadly, "Norvell, I'm afraid Dr. Proctor isn't really interested in our client's bequest."

"Too bad," Bligh said. "Well, luckily the 'copter's waiting."

DR. Proctor sputtered and led them to the Hall of Basics. They gravely studied the spinning jenny, the sewing machine, the telegraph, the telephone, the airplane, the Model T, the atomic pile.

They stopped before the G-M-L bubble house, beaming approvingly—except for Dr. Proc-

tor. A tourist family of five was hogging the descriptive plaque. It was a minute or so before they could get close enough to read it.

No. 342371
THE FIRST G-M-L HOME
Donated by Mr. Hamilton Moffatt
"Father of the Bubble House"

This G-M-L Home, moved to the Museum from its original site in Coshocton, Ohio, was fabricated in the plastics factory of Donald Lavin. Electrical circuitry and mechanisms were designed and installed by Bernard Gorman. It has stood for more than five decades without a scar or a malfunction. Chemists and engineers estimate that, without any sort of maintenance, it will last at least 1,000 more years, standing virtually forever as a tribute to the immortal genius of

MR. HAMILTON MOFFATT

"Do tell," murmured the attorney. The director glumly started to lead them through the bubble house.

"Hell with it," said Mundin. "Let's go back to your place."

In Dr. Proctor's private office, Mundin looked at the small, dusty bottle the director exhumed from an umbrella rack. He shuddered and said decisively, "No, nothing to drink, thanks. Dr. Proctor, I think I can definitely state that my client would be interested in donating twenty thousand dollars as a fund to be divided at your discretion between the Hall of Basics and the Coelenterata collection."

"Dear me!" Dr. Proctor leaned back in his chair, fondling the bottle, his face wreathed in smiles. "Dear me! Are you sure you wouldn't care to—just a very small—no? Do you know, perhaps I will, just to celebrate. A *very* wise decision, sir! It is, believe me, *most* unusual to find a layman who, like yourself, can at once perceive the ecological significance and *thrilling* morphology of the humble coelenterate!" He tipped the bottle into a dusty water tumbler and raised it in a toast. "The Coelenterata!" he cried.

MUNDIN was fumbling in his briefcase. He produced a check, already made out, a typed document in duplicate, and a flat can that gurgled.

"Now," he said matter-of-factly, "pay close attention, Doctor. You, personally, are to dilute the contents of this can with one quart of ordinary tap water, fill an ordinary garden sprayer with the solution, and spray the G-M-L Home in the Hall of Basics with it, covering all plastic parts from the outside. It shouldn't take more than ten minutes, if you have a good sprayer. Naturally, you will make sure nobody sees you doing it. That should be easy enough, in your position, but make abso-

lutely sure of it. And that will be that."

Dr. Proctor, eyes bulging, coughed an ounce of tinted grain neutral spirits over his desk. Choking and wheezing, he at last got out, "My dear sir! What on *earth* are you talking about? What is in that container? Why should I do any such preposterous thing?"

"I'll take your questions in order. I am talking about twenty thousand dollars. What is in that container is something worth twenty thousand dollars. You should do it because of twenty thousand dollars."

Dr. Proctor wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, almost speechless. "But—but if you assured me that the fluid would be entirely harmless—"

"I'll do no such thing. Where I come from, you can get away with quite a lot for twenty thousand dollars." Mundin smiled frostily. "Come now, Doctor. Think of twenty thousand dollars! Think of the ecological significance and the thrilling morphology. And then sign this receipt—and *then* take the check."

Dr. Proctor looked at the check. "It's post-dated a month," he said tremulously.

Mundin shrugged and began to repack his briefcase. "Well, if you're going to *quibble*—"

Dr. Proctor snatched the check. He scribbled his name on the receipt and, with a quick, furtive movement, dropped the flat can of fluid into his desk.

In the return 'copter, Mundin and Bligh looked at each other. "He'll do it," Norvie Bligh said gravely.

"He will. And that means we've got to have the serial numbers from the G-M-L files fast. You'd better see your friend Arnie Dworcas tonight."

Bligh choked down a protest. This part was his job.

ARNIE Dworcas let him in, for he was old Norvell, the true friend, the shy acolyte. Sitting there with Arnie, listening to Arnie's explanations of world affairs, it seemed to Norvie that Belly Rave was a nightmare and Mundin a figure from a dream. Nothing had changed, nothing would ever change, as long as he could sit and drink Arnie's beer.

But there were changes . . .

Arnie drained his glass of beer, wiped his mouth and dialed another.

"No, Norvell," he said meditatively, "I wouldn't say that you have succeeded. Not as we Engineers understand success. To us Engineers, a mechanism—and all of us are mechanisms, I, you, everybody—a mechanism is a success when it is functioning at maximum efficiency. Frankly, in

my little experiment of suggesting that you try Belly Rave, I was attempting to perform what we call 'destructive testing'—the only way in which maximum efficiency can be determined. But what happened? By pure fortuitousness, you made a connection and are now a really able man's secretary." He sipped his beer sorrowfully. "To use an analogy, it's as if my slipstick were to take credit for the computations I make on it."

"I'm sorry, Arnie," Norvell said. It was very difficult to decide whether be wanted to laugh in Arnie's face or take out some of those front teeth with a beer glass. "Mr. Mundin thinks a great deal of you and your brother, too, you know. You impressed him very much when you met him."

"Naturally. That's one of the things you'll have to learn. Like seeks like, in human relations as well as electrostatics."

"I thought in electrostatics like *repelled*—"

"There you go!" yelled Arnie violently. "The dogmatic, argumentative layman! It's people like you that—"

"I'm sorry, Arnie!"

"All *right*. Don't get so excited. Really able people never lose control of themselves, Norvell! That was a stupid thing for you to get all upset about."

"I'm sorry, Arnie. That's what I was telling Mr. Mundin."

Arnie, raising his glass irritatedly, stopped it in mid-air. He peered suspiciously at Norvie over the rim. "*What* were you telling Mr. Mundin?"

"Why, that you never lost control in an emergency. That you would be a damned good man to put in charge of—oh! I shouldn't have said anything!" Norvell covered his mouth with both hands.

Arnie Dworcas said sternly, "Norvell, stop stammering and come out with it! In charge of what?"

NORVIE, who had been fighting back a tendency to retch, removed his hands from his mouth. "Well—well, it isn't as if I couldn't trust *you*, Arnie. It's G-M-L."

"What *about* G-M-L?"

Norvie said rapidly, "It's too soon to say anything definite and, *please*, Arnie, don't let a word of it get out. But you've heard the rumors about G-M-L, naturally."

"Naturally!" Arnie said, though he frowned blankly.

"Mr. Mundin is associated with the — uh — the Coshocton bunch, Arnie. And he's looking around—quietly, you know—for key men to replace some of the old duffers. And I took the lib-

erty of mentioning you to him, Arnie. The only thing is, Mr. Mundin doesn't know much about the technical end, you see, and he wasn't sure just how much experience you've had."

"My record is in the professional journals, Norvell. Not that I would feel free to discuss it in this informal manner in any case, of course."

"Oh, of course! But what Mr. Mundin asked me was just what G-M-L Homes models you had worked on—serial numbers and locations and so on. And I had to tell him that all that information was locked up and you couldn't possibly get your hands on it."

Arnie shook his head wonderingly. "Laymen," he said. "Norvell, there is no reason in the world why I can't get micro-films of all that information. It's only corporate fiddle-faddle that causes all the secrecy. We Engineers are accustomed to cutting through the red tape."

Norvell looked worshipful. "You mean you can?"

"I have already said so, haven't I? It's just a matter of going through the records and picking out the units I've worked on myself, then making microfilms—"

"Better microfilm *everything*, Arnie," Norvell suggested. "It'll help Mr. Mundin understand the Broad Picture."

Arnie shrugged humorously. "Why not?"

"Don't forget the serial numbers," Norvell added.

"Laymen," snorted Arnie Dworcas.

XIX

QUITE by chance, the Big Seven were gathered in Ryan's office on the day it happened at the Museum of the National Association of the Builders of the American Dream.

It was an ill-planned meeting, having more than one purpose. At the top level, it was a pep session and information seminar. On a lower level, three teams of auditors, one each for Hubble, Coett and Nelson, were going over the books of Ryan & Mundin. Don Lavin was amiably present and Norma had started things off right when Hubble absent-mindedly attempted to guide her to a seat.

She snapped, "I do not impose on the biological fact that I am a woman and I don't expect anybody to impose on *me*. If Mr. Hubble can't keep his hands to himself, I expect him at least to leave me alone during working hours. After hours, I can manage to avoid him."

Bliss Hubble said with a straight face, "Sorry, Lavin. It won't happen again." To the

rest, he said cheerfully, "Who'd like to take charge?"

It was Coett, of course. He benignly told Mundin, "We'll just ignore the audit boys outside, shall we? I'm sure their work will be purely routine. Now, among ourselves, how are we doing? I, for one, haven't been able to pick up as much floating G-M-L stock as I'd wish, nor have the prices been right so far."

"Same here," said Hubble.

"Ah—I agree," Nelson said.

Old man Ryan raised his hand. "Up to now, it's been rumors, gentlemen. Very shortly, *things* will begin to happen. I think you'll find some dumping of G-M-L will begin within, say, a week. And with proper management and some luck, there will be as pretty a panic as you could wish within a month thereafter. There won't be time for a rally. Our group, gentlemen, will make the next meeting with a clear majority."

Hubble said abruptly, "I can't get through to Green, Charlesworth." It was a challenge, flung at Coett. "The comptroller of my publishing outfit thought it would be a good idea to renew a mortgage they hold on the transmitter tower in Sullivan County. They said no, so he paid them off in cash from our contingency fund. I thought I'd better check; it looked like a new policy. But I can't get through. When they want to be remote—*you* know."

"I find that very interesting, Bliss," Nelson said, "Ah—I, too, have had occasion to make a routine inquiry regarding insurance policies. That was six weeks ago and as yet I've had no reply. Green, Charlesworth sometimes appears to be dilatory, of course—a natural reflection of their deeply rooted conservatism."

"They're progressives," Hubble said scornfully.

"Middle-of-the-roaders," insisted Coett.

Hubble asked Coett directly, "Having any trouble, Harry? We've bared *our* bosoms."

"Nothing you could call trouble," Coett said. "Just that I'm not—getting through. Like you gentlemen. Oh, I'm doing business with them, but no real communication."

MUNDIN was inescapably reminded of Captain Kowalik, unnerved and jittery because Commissioner Sabbatino didn't *talk* to him any more. He asked bluntly, "Is this a bad situation?"

They smiled politely and told him not to worry; it wasn't his problem. Green, Charlesworth did nothing on the operating or manufacturing end. They were finance.

Hubble said, "Frankly, I don't know where they stand on this

thing. It was my opinion that they wouldn't give a damn one way or the other. Nelson agreed with me and Harry thought they'd be all for us—not that they vote any G-M-L stock, but with their moral influence. Still, they're a funny outfit, so this lapse may not mean anything."

Mundin asked, "Want me to go calling on them? Level with them? Have it out? Meet whatever terms they may have?"

Four heads swiveled and four incredulous stares drilled him. Coett spoke for all when he said gently, "No."

"My guess is that they're onto us," Hubble elaborated, "that they know every move we make and just haven't committed themselves—yet."

Mundin looked at the three Titans in turn and asked wonderingly, "When you say 'they,' whom do you mean, exactly?"

A three-cornered wrangle developed while old man Ryan dozed off. Coett believed that Green, Cbarlesworth were essentially the top men in the Memphis crowd plus Organie Solvents and New England utilities. He himself was most of the Southwest crowd and practically all of Inorganic Chemicals.

Nelson, who was New England and Non-Ferrous Metals, believed that Green, Charlesworth were essentially California, coal-oil-steel and mass media.

Hubble, who was mass media and New York, said that couldn't be. Unless—with a hard look at Coett and Nelson—somebody was lying like hell. Green, Charlesworth, he thought, were essentially money.

On that, everybody agreed. Worriedly.

"Look," said Mundin, "I just want to get this straight in my mind. Would we seuttle the wbole project if Green, Charlesworth came out against it?"

When somebody tells you, "Say, I've heard a rumor that two and two make four; do you put any stock in that stuff?"—that's the kind of look Mundin got.

Coett said quietly. "Why, yes, Charles. We would."

Hubble's nervous voice cut in, "I don't believe that's going to happen, Charles. It's simply a matter of getting in toueh with them. After all, we're taking a step forward and Green, Charlesworth have always been on the side of progress."

"Conservatism," said Nelson.

"Middle-of-the-roaders," Coett insisted.

That, clearly, was getting them nowhere.

ANNOYED, Mundin demanded, "But who *are* they? Where are they?"

Hubble said, "Their offices are in the Empire State Building—the entire building."

Mundin's eyebrows climbed. "*In New York?* I thought the place was condemned. And are there a real Green and a real Charlesworth?"

Hubble shook his head. They're there, all right. As for a real Mr. Green and a real Mr. Charlesworth—the firm name is a couple of hundred years old, so I'm not sure. When you go there, you never see anyone important. Clerks, junior executives, department heads. You do business with them and there are long waits—weeks, sometimes—while they're 'deciding policy questions.' I suppose that means while they're getting their instructions. Well, now you know as much about Green, Charlesworth as anybody else. Just remember, if they turn up anywhere, or you encounter anything — well, anomalous that makes you *suspect* they're turning up, blow the whistle. We'll handle it."

"But there won't be any trouble," Coett said hopefully, and Nelson nervously agreed.

Norvell Bligh popped in. "It happened!" he yelped, and dived for the television screen. "We had a guy monitoring and it just—"

"At first blamed on vibration," roared a newscaster before Norvie got the sound where he wanted it. "Experts from G-M-L, however, said that at first glance this appears unlikely. A team of G-M-L engineers is being dispatched to Washington to study the wreckage. We bring you now a picture from our library of the first bubble house. As it was—"

The slide flashed on; there stood G-M-L Unit One, dwarfed by the Hall of Basics.

"—and as it is."

A live shot this time: Same site, same hall—but instead of the gleaming bubble house, a tangle of rubbish, with antlike uniformed men crawling about the wreckage.

NORMA Lavin blubbered, "Daddy's first house!" and burst into tears. The others gave her swift, incredulous looks and went right back to staring in fascination and fear at the screen.

"Our Washington editor now brings you Dr. Henry Proctor, Director of the Museum. Dr. Proctor?" The rabbit face flashed on, squirming, scared.

"Dr. Proctor," asked the mellow tones, "what, in your opinion, might be the cause of the collapse?"

"I really—I really have no opinion. I'm—ub—completely in the—uh—dark. It's a puzzle to

me. I'm afraid I can't—uh—be of the slightest— I have no opinion. Really."

"Thank you, Dr. Proctor!"

To Mundin, rapt on the screen, it seemed that all was lost; any fool could read guilt, guilt, guilt plastered on the director's quivering face and at once infer that Proctor had sprayed the bubble house with a solvent supplied by someone else; and it would be only moments until "someone else" was identified as Charles Mundin. But the newscaster was babbling on. The rabbit face flickered off the screen.

The newscaster said: "Ah, I have a statement just handed to me from G-M-L Homes. Mr. Haskell Arnold, Chairman of the Board of G-M-L Homes, announced today that the engineering staff of the firm has reached tentative conclusions regarding the partial malfunction—"

Even the newscaster stumbled over that. The listening men, recalling the pile of rubble, roared and slapped their knees in a burst of released tension.

"The — uh — partial malfunction of G-M-L Unit One. They state that highly abnormal conditions of vibration and chemical environment present in the Museum are obviously to blame. Mr. Arnold said, and I quote, 'There is no possibility whatsoever that this will happen again.' End of quote." The announcer smiled and discarded a sheet from the papers in his hand. Now chummy, he went on: "Well, ladies and gentlemen, I'm certainly glad to hear that and so, I'm sure, are all of you who also live in bubble houses.

"And now, for you sports fans, the morning line on Grosse Point Field Day. It's going to be a bang-up show produced by the veteran impresario Jim 'Blood and Guts' Hanrahan. Plenty of solid, traditional entertainment. First spectacle—"

"Turn that thing off," someone ordered Norvell. Wistfully, he did—straining to catch the last words—remembering.

Harry Coett broke the silence brutally. "Well, that's that. We're committed. Is everybody here as terrified as I am?"

THAT night, a 'copter droned west from New York, Norvie at the stick and Mundin glumly toying with a lever that would push a bowden wire that would open the cock of a pressurized belly tank full of golden fluid.

Norvie asked, "Did I tell you it's a boy? Looked through the fetuscope myself. The doctor said it's the finest forty-day embryo he's seen in twenty years of practice. I tell you, that kid's going to have every advantage I never—"

"Swell, Norvie," Mundin said with a snap in his voice.

Norvie shut up.

Mundin turned on a small pocket reader and slipped microfilm into it. Old records copied on the sneak by Norvie's friend Arnie Dworcas, brought to him proudly and furtively. Much guff about "We Engineers, Mr. Mundin" and "You won't forget this, I hope, Mr. Mundin. As We Engineers say, you brace my buttress and I'll brace yours, hah-hah-hah!"

So the records said G-M-L No. 2 was the northwest corner of the Coshocton Bubble City; proceed along the western side of the polygon, then south . . .

And where the golden drops rained down, Bubble House No. 2, then No. 3, then No. 4 through No. 280 would one by one crumble, leaving families naked to the foundry fumes and weather. And throughout the country, hysteria would be unleashed. G-M-L lessees would frantically hunt for the serial plate of their houses, scribble calculations, wildly phone their friends. There would be a terrific run on sporting goods stores; the morning after the night Coshocton began to crumble, not a sleeping bag or tent would be left on their shelves.

But that was all right. Hubble, Coett and Nelson had quietly bought control of the leading sporting goods companies. The rise in their stocks would constitute a nice little by-product.

Charles Mundin, attorney, checked the tanks for the dozenth time and Norvell Bligh looked rigidly at the instruments that were set on Coshocton.

XX

THE panic was as pretty as could be desired. Probably not one man-hour of work was done for days by anybody who occupied a bubble house. Hubble, Coett and Nelson flooded the New York Parimutuel Stock Exchange with agents. A satisfactory trickle of dumped G-M-L stock began to run into their portfolios, against bidding by scattered, unready, disorganized agents for the Arnold group that controlled the G-M-L Board.

Clearly, it was time for another session on the neutral ground of Ryan & Mundin, Attorneys at Law.

"Progress, gentlemen," Coett said happily after they had pooled information. "We are within sight of fifty-one per cent ownership!"

Norma demanded, "Is there going to be any more wrecking?"

Nelson sniffed. "If the Arnold group firms up within, say, two days, they'll be able to hold

against us. In that case, we'll have to hit them with something new."

"No wrecking," Norma said hoarsely.

"You will kindly leave such decisions to us. If we must wreck, we will."

"And so will I!" She picked a vase from Ryan's desk and threw it at Nelson. Her aim was true, but he ducked fast.

The vase exploded with an electric snarl of blue light that charred the wall. Norma's look of utter stupefaction matched any in the room. The silence lasted almost half a minute.

"Call somebody in," Coett said at last, his eyes not leaving the shards on the floor that still smoked.

Mundin phoned, his voice shaky, for the firm's top chemist.

"Not my baby," the chemist said after peering at the fragments. "Get Joe Panelli, Mr. Mundin. It seems to be electrical, whatever it is."

Panelli, communications engineer, pronounced the intact vase to have been a wonderfully clever communicator—whether one-way or two-way, he could not say yet. The crackle in its glaze had been metallic—the vase was small, but the crackle was fine—perhaps a hundred meters of antenna. There were relics of transistors, fused little lumps buried in the clay. The four medallions and the band about the shoulder of the vase might contain Chinese characters or might not. To him, the characters looked like unfamiliar printed circuits. The bell mouth of the jar suggested a non-directional mike and, yes, it could be a loudspeaker, too.

MUNDIN asked urgently, "Can you find out if there are any more of these things around?"

"Oh, sure, Mr. Mundin," said Panelli. "They put out a signal, so we just scan the bands."

"Can you do that without whoever is listening in knowing about it?" Coett insisted.

"Maybe yes, maybe no. My guess is no. Whoever designed this could—maybe *would*—design the receiving equipment to indicate a drop in energy received when we put a tap on."

"Then don't do it," Coett said.

Panelli gave him a rebellious look.

Mundin said, "Just hold everything, Joe. I'll let you know."

There was another long silence. Hubble broke it with, "Scratch seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars, gentlemen."

"It's an idea," Coett said. He took out his fountain pen, looked wonderingly at it and put it

back in his pocket. He sighed.

Old man Ryan put his face in his hands and groaned. Mundin had a fair idea of what was going through his mind. Back to Belly Rave and despair. And three days from the top.

Mundin said loudly, "Speaking for my clients, the Lavins, I don't see how I can conscientiously let you people back out of the agreement. Nor do I see any reason why you should. Somebody planted a microphone on us—so what? It happens every day."

"Quite a mike," Hubble commented. He alone of the three money men seemed to be unscared. Mundin decided to concentrate on him.

"Why the panic, Bliss? What's wrong with these two?"

"If you think I'm going to say one more word in your offices, Charles, you're crazy. There may be more of those things around. Until this is wrapped up, I think it would be wisest to meet in turkish baths. I don't see how Lavin could get in on such a conference, but perhaps that's best. The fewer who know, the safer the secret."

Mundin exploded, "Damn it, this is crazy! So there's somebody spying on us. What of it? They're just *people*. They've got nothing but *money*. We're people, too, and we've also got money — plenty of it. All right, maybe they have more, but that doesn't make them God almighty. We can lick them if we have to!"

He stopped. Hubble, Coett and Nelson were wincing at every word.

Coett said faintly, "Don't talk any more, Charles. You've said too much. Some interests—well, some people would call them relentless. Not that I'm agreeing for a minute." His eyes were darting around the room.

NORMA Lavin, pale and quivering, stood up. "My father invented the bubble house for—" She began tremblingly, then caught herself. "No! Leaving Daddy out of this, one-quarter of G-M-L Homes belongs to Don and myself. It's ours, understand? *Ours!* Not yours or whoever's scaring the wits out of you. It isn't just money, you know. We got along fine without any. We can do it again. It's *people*. It's making life worth living for the poor slobs who buy their bubble houses with their life's blood! Slavery's against the law. G-M-L's been breaking the law —but *we* are taking over—and *we* are going to stop slavery. You hear me?"

They heard her — and seven people were shouting at once, even old Ryan. "—no better than

a Democrat, young lady!" Nelson was howling. And "For God's sake, let her talk!" screamed Mundin. And Coett was spouting endless shushes, with gestures patting the air.

And the door opened. Mishal, the Ay-rab boy, stared in, terror on his face.

"Visitor," he told them, and disappeared.

"Oh, hell," Mundin said in the sudden silence, starting toward the door. "I told those idiots—oh, it's you." He looked irritatedly at the figure of William Choate IV, now entering. "Hello, Willie. Look, I'm awfully busy right now—"

Willie Choate's lower lip was trembling. "Hello, old man," he said dismally. "I have a—message for you."

"Later, Willie, please."

Willie stood his ground. "Now."

He handed Mundin a square white envelope. Mundin, torn between annoyance and hysteria, opened it and glanced absently at the little white card inside.

Then he glanced at it again.

Then he stared at it until Coett came to life and leaped forward to take it out of his hand. It said in crabbed handwriting:

Green, Charlesworth request the appearance of Mr. Charles Mundin and Miss Norma Lavin when convenient.

IT was a long ride. Willie Choate apologetically took out a magazine as soon as they settled down in the car. "You know what Great-great-granddaddy Rufus said, Charles — 'Happy is he who has laid up in his youth, and held fast in all fortune, a genuine and passionate love for reading.' I always like to—"

"Sure, Willie," said Mundin absently. "Look, what's all this?"

"Of course, he wasn't my real Great-great-granddaddy. Grandpap just kind of took that name when he bought into the firm. It's just a way of—"

"Willie, *please*. Remember how it was in law school, the way I helped you pass the exams and all?"

Willie seemed about to cry. "Charles, what can I say?"

"You can tell me what this is all about!"

Willie looked at Mundin. Then he looked all around him, at glowering Norma, at the fittings of the car. Then he looked at Mundin again. The implication was unmistakable.

"At least tell me what your connection is," Mundin begged.

"Gee, Charles!" But the answer to that one, at least, was plain, written in those soft cow eyes, spelled out in that trembling lip. Willie was what God had made him to be—an errand

boy—and doubtless knew little more than Mundin about what, why or wherefore.

Mundin gave up and let Willie read his magazine, while he stared morosely at the crumbled city they were driving through. Norma's hand, startlingly, sought his for a moment, then jerked away.

The building *smelled* old. They stepped into a creaking elevator and slowly went up fifty flights. A long walk and then another elevator, even smaller, even creakier.

Then a small room with a hard bench. Willie left them there; all he said was, "See you."

Then—waiting. An hour, several hours. Norma talked about her childhood, her dedicated father, his miserable fate, her bitter disappointment that Don would not grow up to the responsibility of being that great thing, a Lavin. It was scared, compulsive babbling. Something in the air militated against logic and sense. Crawly fingers—

At last she fell silent, her eyes jerking about the room.

Mundin thought he was going to crack apart and start yelling.

Then he realized that that was what Green, Charlesworth wanted him to think, and got a grip on himself.

And, by and by, a small, quiet man came and led them into another room.

There was no place to sit and no place to hang their coats. Mundin draped his over his arm and stood staring back into the unblinking eyes of the man seated at the desk. He was an imposing figure of a man, lean-featured, dark-haired, temples shot with silver. He leaned forward, comfortably appraising. His chin was in one cupped hand, tbe fingers covering his lips, his eyes following Mundin. His chest rhythmically rose and fell; otherwise, he was stock still.

Mundin cleared his throat. "Mr.—ah—Green?"

THE man said emotionlessly, "We despise you, Mr. Mundin and Miss Lavin. We are going to destroy you."

Mundin cried, "Why?"

"You are Rocking the Boat," the man said through bis fingers, the piercing eyes locked with Mundin's own.

Mundin cleared his throat. "Look, Mr. Green—you *are* Mr. Green?"

"You are Our Enemy, Mundin."

"Now wait a minute!" Mundin took a deep breath. *Please!* he silently begged his adrenal gland. *Gently!* he ordered the pounding sensation in his skull. He said temperately, "I'm sure we can get together, Mr.—sir. After all, we're not greedy."

The figure said steadily, "People like you would doom Civilization As We Know It if we let them. We do not intend to."

Mundin swept his eyes hopelessly around the room. This man was obviously mad; someone else, *anyone* else—But there was no one. Barring the desk and the man, there was nothing in the room but a pair of milky glass cabinets and Mundin and Norma.

He said, "Look, did you call us down here just to insult us?"

"You two put your Fingers in the Buzz Saw. They will be Lopped Off."

"Insane," Norma muttered faintly.

"Dammit!" Mundin yelled. He hurled his coat violently to the floor, but it did nothing to calm him. "If you're crazy, say so and let me get out of here! I never came across such blithering idiocy in my life!"

He stopped in the middle of a beginning tirade; stopped short.

The man wasn't looking at him any more. The same unblinking and unwavering gaze that had been on Mundin was now piercingly directed at the coat on the floor.

To the coat, the motionless man said, "We brought you two here to see Infamy with Our Own Eyes. Now we have seen it and we will Blot It Out." And then startlingly, shrilly, "Hee!"

Mundin swallowed and stepped gingerly forward. Three paces and he was at the desk, leaning over, looking at what should be the neatly tailored trousers of the man's modest suit.

The personnel of Green, Charlesworth were not wearing trousers this year. The personnel of Green, Charlesworth were wearing bronze pedestals with thick black cables snaking out of them, and brass nameplates that read:

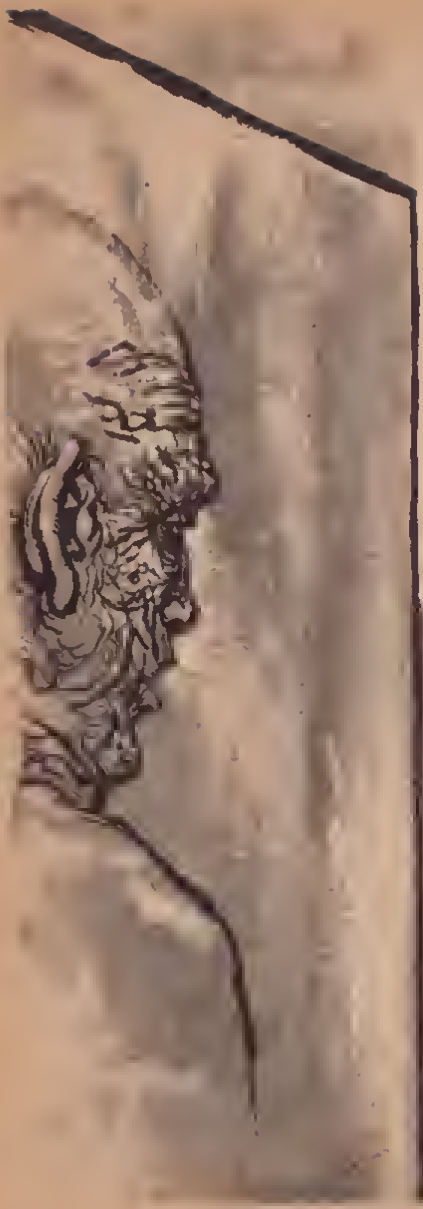
SLEEPLESS RECEPTIONIST
115 Volt A. C. Only

"Hee!" shrilled the motionless lips, just by Mundin's ear. "That's far enough, Mundin. You were right, I suppose, Mrs. Green."

MUNDIN leaped back as though the 115 volts of A. C. had passed through his tonsils. A flicker of light caught his eye; the two milky glass cabinets had lighted up. He looked, peripherally aware that Norma had toppled in a faint beside him.

He wished he hadn't looked.

The contents of the cabinets were Green and Charlesworth. Green, an incredibly, impossibly ancient dumpy-looking, hairless female. Charlesworth, an incred-



ible, impossibly ancient string-bean-looking, hairless male.

Mercifully, the lights flickered out.

Another voice said, but from the same motionless lips, "Can we kill them, Mr. Charlesworth?"

"I think not, Mrs. Green," the Sleepless Receptionist answered itself in the first voice.

Mundin said forcefully, "Now wait a minute." It was pure reflex. He came to the end of the sentence and stopped.

The female voice said sadly, "Perhaps they will commit suicide, Mr. Charlesworth. Tell him what he is Up Against."

"He knows what he is Up Against, Mrs. Green. Don't you, Mundin?"

Mundin nodded. He was obsessed by the Sleepless Receptionist's eyes, now piercingly aimed at him again—attracted, perhaps, by the movement.

"Tell him!" shrieked Mrs. Green. "Tell him about that *boy*. Tell him what we'll do to him!"

"A Child of Evil," the male voice said mechanically. "He wants to take G-M-L away from us."

Mundin was galvanized. "Not you! Just Arnold and his crowd!"

"Are Our Fingers Us?" the female voice demanded. "Are Our Arms and Legs Us? Arnold is Us!"

The male voice piped, "The girl, Mrs. Green. The *girl!*"

"Painted Courtesan," observed the female voice. "She wants to free the slaves, she says. She

talks about Mr. Lincoln!

"But you know we fixed Mr. Lincoln's Wagon, Mr. Charlesworth," chortled the female voice.

"We did, Mrs. Green. And we will Fix her Wagon, too."

Mundin, thinking dazedly that he should have been more careful where he put Ryan's yen pox—it was stupid of him to get it mixed up with his vitamin pills—said feebly, "Are you *that* old?"

"Are we that old, Mrs. Green?" asked the male voice.

"Are we!" shrilled the female. "Tell him! Tell him about the boy!"

"Perhaps not now, Mrs. Green. Perhaps later. When we have Softened them Up. You two may go now."

Mundin automatically put on his coat and lifted Norma to his shoulder. He turned dazedly to the door. Halfway, he stopped, staring at the milky glass. Glass, he thought. Glass and quivering, moving corpses inside that a breath of air might—

"Try it, Mundin," challenged the voice. "We wanted to see if you would."

Mundin decided against it.

"Too bad," said the voice of Charlesworth. "We hate you, Mundin. You said we were not God Almighty."

"Athiest!" hissed the voice of Mrs. Green.

XXI

BACK in Ryan's office, Mundin said, lying, "It wasn't so bad."

Ryan had taken advantage of their absence to get coked to the eyebrows. He said dreamily, "Think of them, hundreds of years old. You know what H. G. Wells said? 'A frightful queerness is coming into life.' Nothing went right, no matter what you did. You know what Jonathan Swift called Green, Charlesworth? Struldbrugs. Those were the only people were on to them. Gulliver said they had a law that no Struldbrug could keep his money after he was a hundred. Think of them, hundreds of years old, hundreds and hundreds and hun—"

Don Lavin touched his shoulder and he stopped.

Harry Coett, smiling affably at his own thumbnail, said gently, "How about a drink?"

Mundin poured it for him, pretending not to notice that the big man was quite soaked with sweat there in the air-conditioned room.

"We must proceed to an orderly liquidation," Nelson said, his eyes jumping from one corner to another. "Naturally, any further action along our previous lines is out of the question."

Norma appeared at the door

carrying a projector. Mundin had left her in her office under the care of the company nurse.

"Is it all settled by now?" she asked grimly.

"Everybody seems to be in agreement." Mundin felt weighed down by a tremendous apathy. Four men who aggregated eight times his age, thirty times his business experience—you couldn't buck all that.

Norma opened the projector and swept papers from Ryan's desk.

"I just wanted to show you," she said. "These are the family's home movies. It's kept me going through some hard times . . ." She dimmed the lights and turned on the projector.

"Here's Father," she said. "In the plant."

Somebody had sneaked up with a camera, catching Lavin unaware. The "plant" looked very much like a cinder-block barn, with benches and presses. Three people working on a big breadboard electrical layout, backs to camera.

Tired, authoritative voice: "You don't seem to get the idea, Bernie. I don't just want a door. The Egyptians had doors. I don't just want a *good* door. Some doors have been pretty good in the past five thousand years. I want a *perfect* door. Hell, I guess my mistake is c*alling* it a door. That creates a picture in your mind. Now let's scrap all this junk of yours and think about entering-and-leaving devices."

An agonized protest: "Mr. Lavin, twenty-six months of work!"

LAVIN lost his temper. "Twenty-six months of work, Gorman, versus five thousand years of drafts, squeaks, sticks, slams, irritation, muscle-strain, lost keys, burglary, scuffed thresholds, scarred panels, that damned ridiculous disproportionate strain on the upper hinge that *guarantees* malfunction, the stupidity of making doors too small for furniture and too large for people! Don't come whining to me about your lousy twenty-six months of pooping around! *Think* about it, Gorman! Use your head for a change! We're trying to bring some ease and graciousness into life for everybody! Let's *do* something for people instead of whimpering about twenty-six months—"

The speaker turned, then grinned startledly at whoever the cameraman was, and waved. Gorman looked sulky and defensive as the clip ran through. It was, Mundin uneasily realized, a foretaste of his eventual suicide because of frustration and defeat.

Norma said, hushed, "A quick one of our living quarters." It was a posed shot of Lavin and his

wife. The background was something that looked like a chicken coop, but was more likely a variety of pre-fab dwelling. Beaverboard walls insecurely held together by battens, a smoky oil heater, a grotesque chrome-and-formica dinette set ferociously trying to elbow the two Lavins out of the picture altogether. Mr. Lavin was smiling absently. His wife looked sour and darted uncertain looks at the smoking heater. Obviously she couldn't wait to get at it.

"The trade show," Norma said. "The awards banquet."

It was the speakers table of any grand ballroom of any downtown hotel. The debris of squab with wild rice, cups of deathly black coffee and melting, multicolored ice cream being removed by sullen banquet waiters. A toastmaster pinged on his water glass as he rose and cleared his throat into the mikes.

"Members and guests," he said fruitily, "of the Delivered Dwelling Industrial Association. It is altogether fitting and proper tonight that we have gathered to do honor to a new star in the constellation of Delivered Dwelling manufacturers. Surely, as we review the meteoric rise of Donald Lavin, there can be none here who doubts that he is a man who does credit to the industry, a competitor who fights hard and clean, a designer of striking originality and a businessman whose acumen points the way toward an entirely new concept of Delivered Dwelling finance and underwriting. Members and guests, it gives me great pleasure to present to Mr. Donald Lavin of Coshocton, Ohio, this plaque designating him the Delivered Dwelling Manufacturer of the Year!"

APPLAUSE; passing the plaque; still photographers crowding in for shots. Lavin rising. To his left, a man like an undernourished shoat — Gorman. To his right, a gaunt man who looked like an exceptionally lean gray rat—Moffatt.

Lavin fumbled the plaque for a moment and then uncertainly put it down.

He said, "Thanks. Maybe I'm accepting this thing under false pretenses—I know the title of my speech is supposed to be 'New Approaches to the Delivered Dwelling,' but first I'd like to give some credit where credit's due and to make a correction in the introductory remarks. To my left is sitting Mr. Bernard Gorman, who deserves as much credit as I for the design of the Lavin House. I may be the dynamo some people have called me, but Bernie's the detail man, the best I ever knew, and I'm not going to

let him get away without taking a bow."

Gorman rose and bobbed, flushing.

"Reference was also made to me as a businessman. I decline the honor. The only businessman on our premises is our good treasurer and comptroller, Hamilton Moffatt, without whose common sense and fiscal know-how, my company would never have got off the ground."

The thin gray rat took a precise little bow, unasked.

"And I should say that Mr. Walsh's introductory remarks about our novel policy of financing and underwriting by industrial purchase and subsequent leasing are Mr. Moffatt's idea and a darned good one, too, for a young company in need of working capital—but an idea that I hope we'll be in a position to abandon shortly.

"And now to my main heading. There's no need for me to be modest, is there? You all know the Lavin House is good or you wouldn't have given me that plaque. How did it get that way? Partly because technology is at last developed to the point where good housing is possible; partly because I realized long ago that human stupidity is nowhere so marked and so costly as in housing.

"I sat up one day in my bedroom. The floor was wooden. The walls were paint over paper, over plaster, over lath, over two-by-fours. The roof was gabled. The windows were steel-casement. The doors were hinged slabs. The stairs were stairs—and I can say nothing worse of them. The people in that house were hot in the summer, cold in the winter, assailed by pollen and every passing street noise—oh, yes, the house was, of course, equipped with central air-conditioning. The place was filthy, requiring a battery of cleaning machinery to be hauled about weekly or oftener."

LAVIN paused. "The house was a weird combination of the flexible and the rigid, which meant that there were cracks. It was a Tinker Toy structure—lots of little bits fastened to other little bits with little fastening devices, which meant that little bits were continually coming loose and falling off and having to be replaced. That house fought its occupants like a tiger — or I should say like a plague of ants. It nibbled away at its occupants' leisure and serenity instead of supplying both in copious quantities.

"I sat up in my bedroom and decided this foolishness had gone on long enough. The next day, I drew my first sketches of a better house, and I continued draw-

ing for ten years. By then, I was ready to start on a pilot model, which took five years. After that, I was ready to start on the production problem, which we have only just licked—I say with my fingers crossed.

"Am I wandering from the subject, New Approaches to the Delivered Dwelling? I hope not. My new approach, gentlemen, was to think of the dweller in the dwelling and give him a house that helps him instead of fighting him. A house at a cost he can afford, without any disasters in the way of repairs. A house that gives him light to see by, privacy, safety for his kids, leisure for his wife and him, variety to make homecoming a happy adventure instead of a revolting daily chore.

"My New Approach to the Delivered Dwelling, gentlemen, was nothing more or less than a sincere attempt to leave the world a better and happier place for millions than it was when I found it."

The applause was sparse and dubious.

Norma flicked the machine off, but did not brighten the lights. She said broodingly, "So Moffatt sold him out, broke his heart and killed him. And today that dream is a nightmare to millions of wretched people chained to their jobs by G-M-L contract leases . . ."

She turned on the three financiers, figures in the gloom.

"Well?" she demanded harshly. "Don can walk into that stockholders meeting and take over with your backing. It *matters,* don't you see? It *matters.*"

MUNDIN cleared his throat and said, "I'm sticking with it, Norma."

She didn't flare at him for using her first name, but continued to stare her challenge.

Nelson murmured, "An orderly liquidation, under the circumstances, still seems most advisable. If you will excuse me—" He slipped discreetly from the room.

Coett, big bluff man, told her, "Ideals don't matter much when you're my age. My advice to you is to peddle your stock on the Big Board, live happily ever after—and stay away from Green, Charlesworth. Uplift doesn't pay. Now I've got to go." He went.

Hubble was gnawing his nails. He said, "I was brought up to be a sensible, dollar-fearing young man and Green, Charlesworth have more dollars than anybody else around . . . You know, I liked that look on your father's face when he told them about homecoming being a happy adventure . . . For God's sake, don't tell anybody, but I'm stick-

ing with you as long as my nerve holds out."

Norma flung her arms around him and kissed him. Charles said, "Hey, cut that—" and then realized he had no basis whatsoever for the proprietary feeling which had suddenly overwhelmed him. But he turned up the lights, anyway.

"Where's Don?" he asked.

Norma was recovering from her elation. "Must've slipped out."

Mundin called Norvell Bligh in and asked after Don.

"Oh, yes," the little man said. "He left about three minutes ago."

"Left? Where to?"

"Well, I asked him in case, and all he said was 'High wire.' Some kind of joke, I suppose."

"High wire?" Mundin asked Norma blankly.

She shook her head.

"He seemed in high spirits," Bligh chatted. "His eyes were shining like stars. Most unusual—"

"My God!" said Norma. "A post-hypnotic command from his conditioning!"

"Does anybody," Hubble demanded, "know what a high wire may be? There could be some perfectly simple explanation."

Norvie's jaw had dropped. He said at last, faintly, "I know quite a lot about high-wire work. It's the most dangerous stunt they put on at a Field Day."

A raucous cackle filled the room.

"*Absolutely. Mr. Charlesworth?*"

"*Positively, Mrs. Green!*"

Hell broke loose. A seat cushion exploded. Then a fountain pen in Norvie's pocket. The *In* basket on Ryan's desk. There were screams from the outside offices; Mundin ran out. A diffraction grating in the chem lab. Steno's lip-sprays. An acetate recording blank for a dictating machine. The water cooler—that was a sloppy one. A magazine in the reception room.

Eventually things settled down. The last hysterical filing clerk was sent home, the last of the little fires put out.

Hubble, white with rage, snapped, "Let's go to my place. They can't have that gimmicked."

Norvell Bligh said: "Excuse me, Mr. Hubble—I don't think there's time. Field Day is tomorrow at two in the afternoon."

XXII

THEY searched throughout the night. Hard. They found the cabby at dawn.

"Sure, mister, I hacked him. Right to the artist's entrance at Monmouth. Friend of yours? Some kind of dare?"


IN

They tried to bribe their way into the arena and almost made it. The furtive gatekeeper was on the verge of swallowing their cock-and-bull story and palming their money when the Night Supervisory Custodian showed up. He was a giant and his eyes shone.

He said politely, "I'm sorry, folks — unauthorized access is forbidden. However, lineup for bleacher seats begins in a couple of hours. Hello, Mr. Bligh. I haven't seen you around lately."

"Hello, Barnes," Norvell said. "Look, can you possibly let us through? There's a fool kid we know who signed up on a dare. It's all a silly mistake and he was muggled up, besides—"

The giant sighed regretfully. "Unauthorized access is forbidden. If you had a pass—"

The hackie said, "I don't mind waiting, folks, but don't you have better sense than to argue with a conditioned guy?"

"He's right," Norvell admitted. "Hell won't get you by Barnes without a pass or a release. Let's try Candella. He used to be my boss, the louse."

The taxi whizzed them to the amusement company's bubble city and Candella's pleasure dome. Ryan snoozed. Norma and Mundin held hands—scared. Bligh looked brightly interested, like a fox terrier. Hubble, hunched on a jump seat, mumbled worriedly to himself.

Candella awakened and came to the interviewer after five minutes of chiming. Obviously he couldn't believe his eyes. "Bligh?" he sputtered. "Norvell Bligh?"

"Yes, Mr. Candella. I'm sorry to wake you up, but it's urgent. Can you let us in?"

"Certainly not! Go away or I'll call the police!" The interviewer blinked off. Norvell leaned on the chime plate and Candella reappeared. "Damn it, Bligh, stop that. How dare you?"

Mundin elbowed Norvell from the scanner eye. "Mr. Candella, I'm Charles Mundin, attorney at law. I represent Mr. Donald Lavin. I have reason to believe that Lavin took a release and is now in the artist's quarters at Monmouth, due to appear in today's Field Day. I advise you that my client is mentally incompetent to sign a release and that therefore your organization will be subject to heavy damages, should he be harmed. I suggest that this can be quickly adjusted by you in filling out the necessary papers canceling your contract with him. Naturally, we're prepared to pay any indemnity—or service fee." He lowered his voice. "In small bills and plenty of them."

"Come in," Candella said blandly and the door opened.

He gaped as they entered. "My God, an army!"

THE house intercom said in a female voice, "What is it, Poopsie?"

He flushed. "Business. Switch off, please, Panther Girl—I mean Prudence." There was a giggle and a click. "Now, gentlemen and miss—no, I don't care what your names are—let me show you one of our release forms. Here, you said you were a lawyer. Have a look."

Mundin studied it for ten minutes. Ironclad? Watertight? No, tungsten-carbide-coated, braced, buttressed, riveted, welded and fire-polished. Airtight, hard-vacuum-proof, guaranteed not to wilt, shrink, sag, wrinkle, tear or bag at the clauses under any conceivable legal assault.

Candella was enjoying Mundin's expression. "Think you're the first?" he snickered. "If there's been one, there have been a million. But there hasn't been a successful suit for thirty years, Mr. Attorney."

Mundin said, "Hang the law, Mr. Candella. Hang the bribe, too, if you don't want it. It's a humanitarian matter. The kid's got no business in there—"

Candella turned righteous. "I'm protecting my company and its stockholders, Mr. Whoever-you-are. As a policy matter, we can allow no exceptions. Our Field Days would be a chaos if every drunken bum—"

Mundin was about to clobber him when Norvell unexpectedly caught his arm. "No use, Charles. I never realized it before—he's a sadist. Of course. Who else could hold that job and enjoy it? You're interfering with his love life when you try to get one of his victims away from him. We'll go higher."

Candella snorted and showed them pointedly to the door.

In the taxi again, Mundin said to Hubble, "I guess this is where you take over, Bliss."

The financier flipped through a notecase and reached for the phone as they rolled back toward the Park. He dialed and snapped, "Sam? Mr. Hubble here. Good morning to *you*. Sam, who's in charge of the outfit that puts on the Monmouth Field Days? I'll wait." He waited and then said, "Oh—thanks, Sam," and hung up the phone. He told them, looking out the window, "Trustee stock. Held by the Choate firm. And we know who they run errands for, don't we?" He drummed his fingers. "Bligh, you must know *some* way in. You worked there, after all."

Norvell said, "The only way in is with a release."

Norma urged with dry hysteria, "Then let's sign releases."

They stared. "I'm not crazy. We want to find Don, don't we? And when we find him, we restrain him—with a club, if we have to. We can sign for crowd extras or something like that, can't we, Norvie? It's all volunteer, isn't it?"

Norvell said, "Remember, I wasn't a pit boss. I was on the planning end. And from the planning end, it was all supposed to be volunteer. But maybe it's not such a bad idea. I'll go in alone. I know the ropes—"

"Not you," Mundin said. "He won't *want* to be found. He'll fight. I'll go—"

They would all go. And then Norvell had a bright idea and it took a lot of small bills to get the hackie to take them to Belly Rave and an hour to find Lana of the Wabbits.

"We'll be there," she promised casually.

THE briefing room beneath the stands was huge and crowded. About a quarter of the occupants were obvious rumdums, another quarter were professionals, another quarter swaggering youngsters in for a one-shot that they'd brag about the rest of their lives. The rest seemed to be—just people. It was twelve-thirty and everybody had been given an excellent hot lunch in the adjoining cafeteria.

One professional had noticed Mundin hungrily wolfing down his and suggested, "Better not, stranger. Belly wounds." Mundin had abruptly stopped.

There was no sign so far of Don Lavin, which was not odd. It was easy enough to lose yourself in that crowd. Their bopes were pinned on twenty Wabbits whom Lavin would have—he'd think—no reason to avoid.

Somebody on the rostrum said, "May I have your attention, please? You stumblebums in the corner there—that means you, too. Thanks, all." He was a distraught young man who ran his fingers through his hair.

Norvie whispered to Mundin. "Wilkes. He'll have a nervous breakdown by tonight. Every year. But—" wistfully—"he's a good MC."

Wilkes went on, "You know this is the show of the year, ladies and gentlemen. Double fees and survivor's insurance for this one. And in return, ladies and gentlemen, we expect you all to do your absolute best for Monmouth Park.

"Now let's get on with the casting. First, a comedy number. We need some old gentlemen and ladies—nothing violent; padded clubs in a battle-royal to the finish. The last surviving lady gets five hundred dollars; the surviving gentlemen gets one thousand.

Let's see some hands there! No, not you, buster—you can't be a day over seventy."

"Take it," Bligh told Ryan. "Go with them and keep your eyes open for Don."

Ryan got the nod and tottered away with the other old ladies and gentlemen.

"Now are there two good men who fancy themselves as knife-fighters, Scandinavian style? Don't waste my time if you have a pot-belly." Scandinavian style meant being fastened together by a belt with two feet of slack. "One thousand? Anybody at one thousand? All right, I'll make it twelve-fifty and if there isn't a rising ovation, we drop the number, you yellow crumbs!" Perhaps a dozen pros hopped up, grinning. "Fine response! Let's make it six matches simultaneous. Take 'em away, boys."

The casting went on. Mickey's Inferno; Lions and Tigers and Bears; Kiddie Kutups, which scooped in all the Wabbits. Lana shot Mundin a glance and shrug. No Don Lavin—but the crowd was thinning.

"Roller Derby!" Wilkes called. "Spiked elbows, no armor. Five hundred a point to contestants, twenty flat to audience, a hundred to audience members if a contestant lands on him or her and draws blood."

Norvell gathered the eyes of Mundin, Norma and Hubble. They rose, were accepted for "audience" and hustled out of the briefing room, still vainly peering about for Don. Only after the glass door closed behind them did they see him. He was rising—with glazed, shining eyes—for High Wire with Piranha. Price, ten thousand dollars. And he was the only volunteer.

Norma struggled with the immovable door until two matrons yanked her away and shoved her in the direction of the ready room.

"I'll think of something," Norvie kept saying. "I'll think of something."

XXIII

NORVELL tried the chummy approach with the ready-room manager. He was brushed off. Norvell tried entreaties and then threats. He was brushed off. The ready-room manager droned: "You made yer bed, now lie in it. Alluva sudden you an' ya frenns get yella, no skin offa my nose. Derby audience ya stood up for, derby audience yer gonna be."

"What's the trouble, Campo?" a fussy and familiar voice suddenly demanded.

It was Stimmens, Norvie's skunk of an ex-assistant who had quietly and competently betray-

ed his boss into Belly Rave. It would have been pure delight to bawl him out, but the stakes were too high.

"Mr. Stimmens," Norvie said humbly.

"Why, Mr. Bluh—why, Norvie! What are you doing here?"

Norvie brutishly wiped his nose on his sleeve. "Trying to make a buck, Mr. Stimmens," he whined. "You know how it is in Belly Rave. I stood up for the Roller Derby audience, but Mr. Campo here says I got yellow. Maybe I did, but I want a switch —from Derby Audience to Highwire Heckler. I know it's only ten bucks, but you don't get one of those spiked-elbow gals in your lap. Can you do it for me, Mr. Stimmens? And a couple of friends of mine? *Please?*"

Stimmens basked. "It's unusual, Norvie. It creates confusion. But for an old employee, we can bend some rules. See that he's switched, Campo."

"And my friends, please, Mr. Stimmens?"

Stimmens shrugged tolerantly. "And his friends, Campo." He sauntered on, glowing with the consciousness of a favor done that humiliated his ex-boss and caused himself no trouble at all.

"You heard him," Norvell said. "Switch!"

Campo growled and reached for his cards.

Back on the bench, Norvell told Hubble, Mundin and Norma briefly, "We're in. It ups Don's chances plenty. You have any cash on you, Mr. Hubble? Pass it around to the other Highwire Hecklers when we go on."

And then there was nothing to do but watch through the glass wall. The Old-timers' Battle Royal was on; they saw Ryan laid out by a vicious swipe to the groin from an octogenarian lady. The clubs were padded, but there was a lot in knowing how to use them. He was carried past the wall, groaning, to the infirmary.

IT was a responsive audience, Norvie noted with pure technical interest, laughing, howling and throwing things at the right time. He heard, in memory, the familiar chant of the vendors, "Gitcha rocks, gitcha brickbats, ya ca-a-an't hit the artists without a brickbat!"

Click, click, and the Scandinavian knife-fighters were on. Snip, snap, the knives flashed and the blood flowed. There were two double-kills out of the six pairs and the band blared from Grieg to Gershwin for the Roller Derby, which would last a good ten minutes.

It was gory. Repeatedly, skaters shot off the banked boards into the "audience" of old stewbums and thrill-seekers rather

than get a razor-sharp elbow spike, and their own spikes wreaked havoc. Almost us, Norvie thought numbly. At a hundred a lapful, almost us.

For the first time in his life, he found himself wondering when and where it all had started. Bone-crushing football? Those hockey games featured by concussions? Impatient sidewalk crowds that roared "Go-go-go" to a poor crazed ledge-sitter? Those fans who flipped lighted firecrackers at the visiting team's outfielders racing for a fly? "We don't take no prisoners in this outfit, kid"? White phosphorus grenades? Buchenwald? Napalm?

And then, before he knew it, Campo was shaking his shoulder and growling, "All right, ya yella punk. You an' yer frenns, yer on. Take yer basket."

He took the basket numbly and looked at the noisemakers and gravel. He followed the section as it moved out onto the field. He became aware that Hubble and Mundin were half carrying him.

"Don't cork out, Norvie," Mundin begged him. "We need every man."

Norvie gave him a pale grin and thought: Maybe I won't have to. Maybe I won't have to. That's the thing to stick with. Maybe I won't have to. But if I do—

"Ladies and gentlemen," the MC roared as they assumed their places around the tank, while the riggers hastily set up the two towers and strung the wire, "Monmouth Park is proud and happy to present, for the first time in this arena's distinguished history, a novel feat of courage and dexterity."

Don had been hustled atop one of the towers. Norma was weeping. Hubble and Mundin were passing among the hecklers, handing out bills.

"No heckling, understand? Just keep quiet. You'll get this much more after it's over. Anybody crosses us up, we'll throw him to the fish. No heckling, understand?"

"This young man, ladies and gentlemen, utterly without previous experience in the gymnastic art, will attempt to cross the fifteen feet from tower to tower against the simultaneous opposition of sixteen opponents. They will be permitted to jeer, threaten, sound horns and cast gravel, but not to shake the towers!"

AUDIENCE identification, thought Norvie. The sixteen "opponents" would be there to do exactly what the audience wanted to do, but was too far away to do. Still, a good strong arm with a favoring wind and a brick—

"The special feature of this

performance, ladies and gentlemen, lies in the tank above which this young man will traverse. At enormous expense, the Monmouth Park Association has imported from the headwaters of the Amazon River a school of the deadliest fish known to man, the famed piranha. Your binoculars, ladies and gentlemen! I am about to drop a fifty-pound sheep into the tank. Kindly watch the result!"

In went the bleating, terrified animal—shaved and with a few nicks on its side for the scent of blood. Then they pulled on the rope and hauled out—bloody bones. There were still ghastly little things flopping and wriggling, dangling from the skeleton. They beat them off into the water with sticks as the crowd shrieked in delight.

Just like you, you swine, Norvie thought. But maybe I won't have to do it—

The earpiece of his hearing aid had slipped a trifle. He looked shyly around and pulled it out preparatory to readjusting it. Then he didn't readjust it. The shrieking crowd, the gloating, smacking language of the MC, the faint creak in the wind of the tower guys—all of it came through.

It was the decision, he told himself, not quite knowing what he meant. He hadn't *wanted* to hear any of it; he hadn't *dared* hear any of it. Not as long as he was a part of the horror.

He went to Norma Lavin and put his thin arm around her shaking shoulders. "It's going to be all right," he said.

She cowered against him, wordlessly.

"I've got a boy coming, you know," he told her.

She gave him a distracted nod, her eyes on the tower.

"And if anything happens," he went on, "it's only fair they should be taken care of—Sandy, Virginia and the boy. You'll remember in case anything happens?" She nodded. "There was this time in Bay City," he chattered. "High wire with piranha. A judge—" She wasn't paying attention.

He got up and joined Mundin. "If anything happens," he said, "it's only fair that Sandy and Virginia and the boy should be taken care of."

"What are you talking about, Norvie?"

"Just remember. *Please* remember."

THE drumroll began and the MC set fire to the platform on which Don Lavin stood. The crowd howled as the flames licked up and the boy hopped convulsively forward, his balancing pole swaying.

The MC yelled angrily at the hecklers, "What's the matter with you people? Toot! Chuck gravel! What do you think you're getting paid for?"

One of them, a young tough, began to swing his rattle, glancing nervously at Hubble. Hubble snapped at him, "A bundred more, buster. Now calm down." The tough calmed down and gaped at the wire-walker.

A foot, two feet, the pole swaying. He has special slippers on, Norvell thought. Maybe it'll be all right, I won't have to do anything and then I can be comfortably deaf again, buying batteries for a penance, turning this nausea off at will.

Three feet, four feet, and the MC howling with rage: "Get in there and fight! Take out your horns! Plaster him!"

Five feet, six feet, and the crowd-noise was ugly, ugly as blood. In one section, a chant had started, one of those foot-stomping, hand-clapping things.

Six feet, seven, and the MC was breaking down into sobs. "We paid you and this is the way you treat us! These fine people in the stands. Aren't you *ashamed?*"

Eight feet, nine feet, ten feet, two-thirds of the way to the second tower. Somebody with a mighty arm and a following wind had found the range. The half-brick at the end of its journey sailed feebly, *plop,* into the tank and white-bellied little things tore at it and bled themselves

and tore at one another. The water boiled.

Suddenly ice-cold, all business, Norvie said dryly to Mundin, "Be ready to haul him out fast. They'll have him in a minute. Remember what I said."

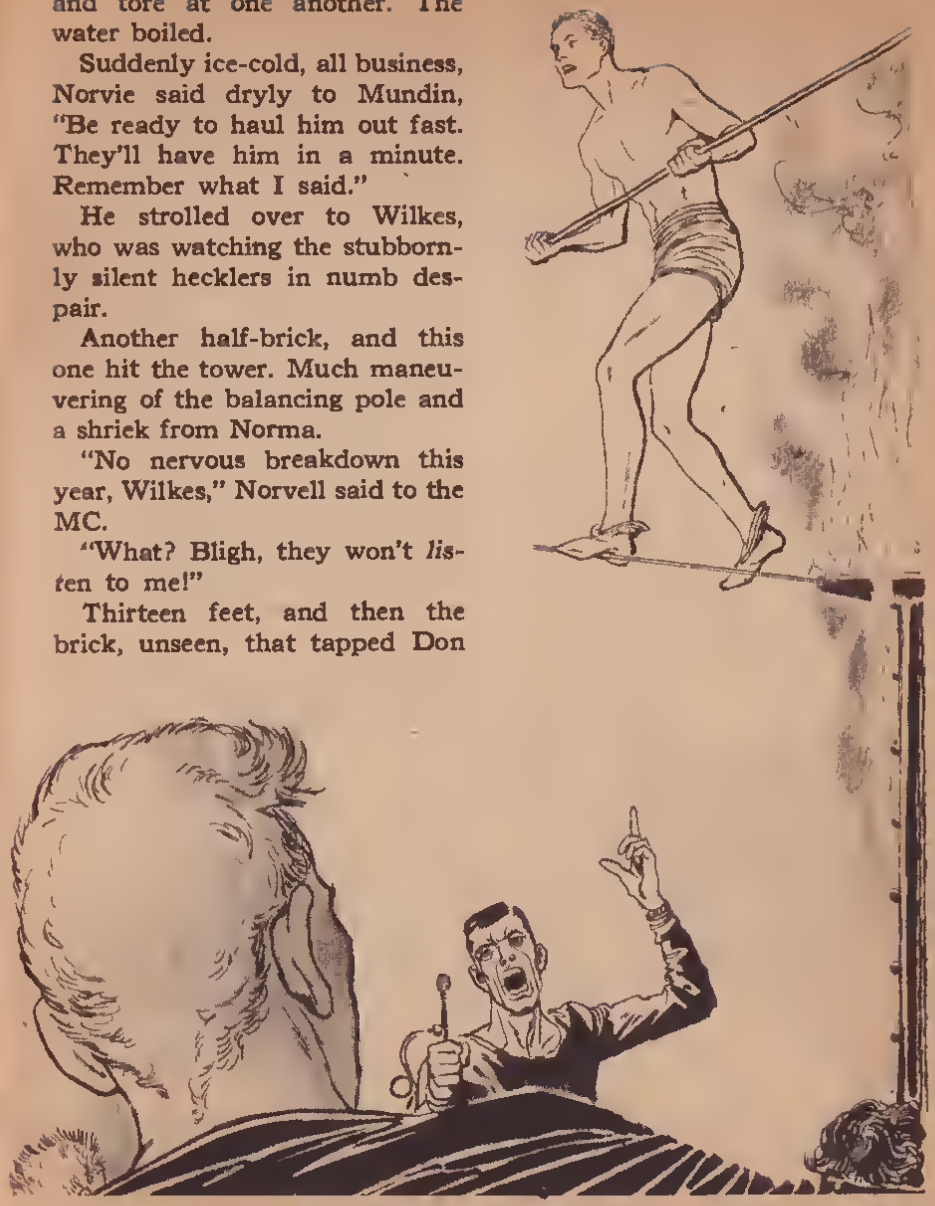
He strolled over to Wilkes, who was watching the stubbornly silent hecklers in numb despair.

Another half-brick, and this one hit the tower. Much maneuvering of the balancing pole and a shriek from Norma.

"No nervous breakdown this year, Wilkes," Norvell said to the MC.

"What? Bligh, they won't *listen* to me!"

Thirteen feet, and then the brick, unseen, that tapped Don



Lavin between the shoulder blades and made him flail the pole too hard.

One last agonized look around the arena was all Norvell could take. There was nothing, no chair, no cushion, nothing hut—

He grabbed the sobbing Wilkes in his arms and lunged into the tank for an eternal instant, before he could see Don Lavin topple and fall. First the water was cool and then boiling.

FOR ten minutes, there was not a sane person in the stadium. The critics would remember that moment all their lives. It was greatness, the ultimate masterpiece of Field Day emotion.

While the piranhas seethed at the far end of the tank, Mundin yanked Don Lavin out in one heave. Not a soul molested the four of them as they walked slowly over the bloody sand. They passed Candella, who stared at them with blind, streaming eyes and said, "Masterpiece! Masterpiece! And I knew him! I walked and talked with *Norvell Bligh!* Art can go no further. *Masterpiece!*"

They picked up Lana and her Wabbits from a deserted ready room.

"I saw it," she said. "Good little man, wasn't he?" She broke off into sobs. "I'll tell his wife and kid," she sniffed at last. "Only—which way should I tell it?"

Mundin thought, Blessed simplicity. Which way? There were undoubtedly a hundred ways, a thousand ways, all true and all intertwined, of telling about that frightful, horrifying, noble moment.

Outside the stadium, the Wahbits were paid and formed fours, stumping grimly off toward the Belly Rave that Norvell Bligh had come to love and serve.

"I think," Don Lavin said slowly, "I'm awake. All the way. And I think I know what woke me up. Sis, Charles, Mr. Hubble—are we going to give those bottled ghouls — Green, Charlesworth—the business? I say we are!"

"First," said Hubble practically, "let me call Sam. His orders were to grab up anything Coett and Nelson dumped on the Exchange. Even if we don't have our majority for tomorrow, we should have enough to Rock the Boat and Monkey With the Buzz Saw, as your two marinated friends put it."

This incurable levity of mine, he thought, and sighed. He noted how Norma Lavin was leaning on Mundin's arm and how she glanced at him.

He thought of how his wife glanced at him and sighed again, this time enviously.

EPILOGUE

From TYCOON, The Magazine for Tycoons:

After a savagely efficient management raid on the gigantic G-M-L Corporation conducted last week during its regular stockholders' meeting, the winners and new champions, Messrs. Hubble and Lavin, issued a terse joint statement promising far-reaching, deep-rooted policy changes.

From the BELLY RAVE TIMES:

Now that we enter our second year, it is time to pause and take stock. I think most of us will be pleased by what we see around us. The Belly Rave Municipal Association launched by my late husband, and of which I now have the honor to be president, is flourishing. Membership now covers eighteen blocks and our Organized Area covers ten. Progress is slow but sure. The re-establishment of sewer mains proceeds at a gratifying pace and everywhere one sees busy hands and happy faces. Truly, as my revered husband used to say, "Self-help is the only kind that sticks."

From the MONMOUTH NEWS:

Newly elected Senator Mundin left for Washington today in his private 'copter after reaffirming his election pledge to raze Old New York to the ground. "We need the metals," he said, "and we need the room. I cannot understand why this condemned slum has been tolerated for many years past the legal date for its extinction. Esthetically speaking, it is also a dreadful eyesore—particularly the old Empire State Building. It must and will be destroyed." The Senator's attractive wife, nee Norma Lavin, accompanied him . . .

From The FIELD DAY FAN:

The cranks are at it again. Those mysteriously financed leaflets and broadcasts and lobbies for compulsory hours of anti-Field Day "education" in the public schools have again flared up. *Your* legal, rational, traditional entertainment is again under attack. For the third time in as many months, this magazine is compelled to solicit contributions that will offset its declining circulation. Attendance figures are down across the nation. But this is not a gloomy picture. The Field Day fans have been stripped to their hard core of true enthusiasts . . . sincerity . . . artistic triumph. Vapid reformers and their bloodless ilk . . . utter inability to comprehend such moments of truth, such avalanches of emotion as were unleashed in the great old days upon the stunned spectator. In this context, we need no more than mention with due reverence the great name *Norwell Blythal*

—FREDERIK POHL
& C. M. KORNBLUTH

FORECAST

Next month's big issue will contain complete stories only . . . and it leads off with F. L. Wallace's provocatively titled novelet THE MAN WHO WAS SIX. What's it about? Well, there is nothing like having a sound mind in a sound body—but Dan Merral had too much of one—and also too much of the other!

SATAN'S SHRINE, another novelet by Daniel F. Galouye, offers the most fiendish torment ever inflicted on humanity. But Satan was worse than a devil . . . he was a man!

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by Arthur C. Clarke

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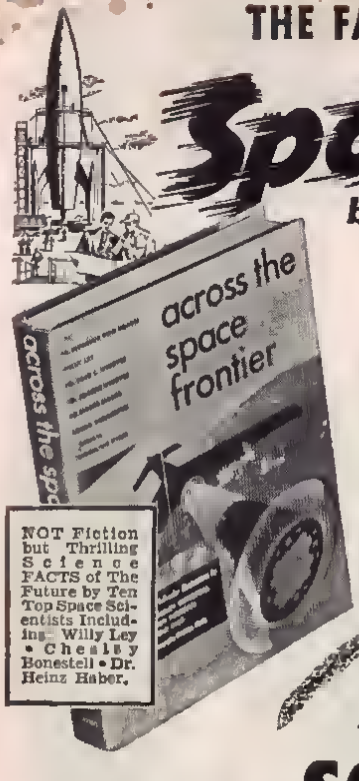

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